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SUMMARY

The thesis seeks to determine the relationship between community feeling and political activity in one interwar town, Northampton. It is argued that localism continued to be an important dimension of social and political experience in this period for businessmen, employers and workers. The development of modern industrial relations and welfare policies in industry gave employers a renewed interest in their location of operations. Depression and decline in the private enterprise economy made municipal intervention important to both the lower middle class and the working class. At the same time central governments expanded the role of local authorities by giving them more mandatory responsibilities and greater funding. A public culture developed in Northampton which stressed service to the common interest and meritocratic leadership. In this context the Labour Party was able to gain some legitimate authority in the town community. Its leaders were accorded a grudging acceptance in the meritocracy. The ethos of public and political life was reflected in neighbourhood and workplace experience. Most Northamptonians defined their social identity in terms of citizenship rather than class. However, there were a number of social, economic and industrial factors which produced a crisis in the 1933 to 1935 period. That crisis increased Labour support and led to abstention by many non-Labour voters. A different approach to the study of society and politics in Britain from 1918 to 1939 is advocated on the basis of the Northampton evidence. It is noted that there already exists considerable material showing that there was a wide range of difference in local response to government social policy. It is also argued that the Labour Party's philosophy and electoral performance during these years may owe more to community influences than has previously been acknowledged.

TOWN PATRIOTISM AND THE RISE OF LABOUR:

NORTHAMPTON 1918-1939

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This dissertation may be photocopied

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PREFACE

As the title of this study suggests it is about the relationship between feelings of community and political activity in one interwar town. Inevitably therefore I am deeply indebted to many of its residents for help and information they have given me. Often the enthusiasm of their co-operation has served to convince me that the ethos described is still alive. The librarians and curators at the Northampton Central Library and Northampton Central Museum deserve special mention for years of careful hoarding of material, as well as willing assistance.

In so far as quantitative methods of research have been used in the study, it is largely due to the advice of Dr Hopkin at the Social History Department of the University College of Wales and Prof Harrison of the University of Warwick Statistics Department. Any errors made in following their advice have certainly been my own.

All published works quoted have been published in London unless otherwise stated.

ABBREVIATIONS

Defence of the Realm Act	DORA
Federation of Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Associations	FBSMA
General Management Committee	GMC
Independent Labour Party	ILP
Labour Representation Committee	LRC
League of Nations Union	LNU
National Confederation of Employers Organisations	NCEO
National Executive Committee	NEC
National Minority Movement	NMM
National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives	NUBSO
National Unemployed Workers Movement	NUWM
Northampton Borough Council	NBC
Northampton Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Association	NBSMA
Northampton Chamber of Commerce	NCC
Northampton Constituency Labour Party	NCLP
Northampton Communist Party	NCP
Northampton Co-operative Society	NCS
Northampton Conservative and Unionist Association	NCUA
Northampton Liberal Association	NLA
Northampton Master Builders Federation	NMBF
Northampton Past and Present	NPP
Northampton Ratepayers Association	NRA
Northampton Trades Council	NTC
Northamptonshire Natural History Society	NNHS
Public Assistance Committee	PAC
Public Record Office	PRO
Social Democratic Federation	SDF
Unemployment Assistance Board	UAB
Workers Education Association	WEA
Working Mens Club	WMC

INTRODUCTION

In Birch's study of the small town of Glossop in 1959 he found that local tradition and community pressure could still have an important influence on the behaviour of its electors.⁽¹⁾ Hampton's later work on the city of Sheffield discovered that there is a persistent "association between community feeling and political activity".⁽²⁾ However, Birch and Hampton both regard this localism as an effect of lesser significance than the national, centralising trends in British political culture. Joyce, one of the most prominent advocates of the role of civic cultures in the nineteenth century, agrees that the major themes of twentieth century life are those of class and nation.⁽³⁾ In his work on the factory towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire in the 1850's to 1880's Joyce emphasised the way that local industrialists determined the political values of their employees and the town population as a whole.⁽⁴⁾ The identification of the family firm with the wider prosperity of the locality and the industrialists' participation in charitable and civic duties created conditions in which occupational and social identity became intertwined. There was a recognisable 'town patriotism' among nineteenth century factory workers.⁽⁵⁾ But the turn of the century brought about "momentous changes in the nature of town life" and these led to the decline of this type of citizenship. One of the most crucial changes was the loss of the industrialists as civic leaders living within the community.

Paul Thompson highlights another aspect of the drift towards a national political culture. After 1914 he argues, political parties ceased to be dependent on the local political activist. The popular press and radio allowed national politicians to speak directly to the electorate.

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1. A H Birch, Small Town Politics (1959), p3
 2. W Hampton, Democracy and Community a Study of Politics in Sheffield (1970)
 3. P Joyce, Work Society and Politics (1980), p336
 4. P Joyce, Work Society and Politics, pp168-169
 5. P Joyce, Work Society and Politics, pp93 and 278

State intervention in welfare undermined the authority of provincial elites in voluntary charity and in municipal government.⁽⁶⁾

Middlemas has woven these themes of centralisation in society into a sophisticated analysis of the state's role in Britain after 1911. As the military, professional associations, churches, charities and municipalities declined in importance the NCEO and the TUC replaced them as "governing institutions".⁽⁷⁾ On the basis of this collaboration between the civil service, the representatives of big business and organised labour, Middlemas postulates the creation of a style of "managerial collective government" which brought about "a new form of harmony in the political system".⁽⁸⁾ As well as being overwhelmingly national in orientation Middlemas's thesis places class relations at centre stage in the conduct of interwar government. At the same time the clash between political parties, often seen as symbolic of the conflict between classes, becomes irrelevant to the reality of a consensus. While the rise of the Labour Party and the decline of liberalism seemed to give political partisanship a greater class significance Party rhetoric actually concealed a subtle process setting the limits of conflict and legitimating existing political authority. Concessions to the working class interest were slowly incorporated into the system in such a way as to avoid the appearance of reaction to public pressure or retreat before supposedly 'revolutionary' forces. The civil service used a rudimentary form of public opinion testing and manipulation to prevent changing Party alignments from becoming a source of challenge to the state.

6. P Thompson, Socialists Liberals and Labour (1967), pp1-10

7. K Middlemas, Politics in Industrial Society (1979), p21

8. K Middlemas, Politics in Industrial Society, p18

Middlemas' evidence for national corporatism highlights the part played by the local state in the process he describes. As he readily acknowledges the state's ability to tailor government policies to the "limits of popular acceptance"⁽⁹⁾ was not infallible. He points to the UAB crisis in 1935 as an example of ineptitude in this respect. The decision to introduce and enforce a uniform scale of assistance payments across the country provoked public protest. It was one of the few occasions on which government retreated in the face of popular pressure. The UAB crisis could be explained in simple terms as a reaction to a deterioration in welfare provision. But historians of social policy have recently given greater theoretical weight to the significance of district and regional differences in provision. Dale, for example, contends that the discretion available to local authorities in responding to state initiative in housing was of fundamental importance. In the context of a recently introduced democratic franchise and a new welfare state post 1918 local autonomy was the means whereby the state could respond sensitively to class and social pressure.⁽¹⁰⁾ But Dale also notes that it could be a source of discord within the state. The way in which local government leaders interpreted national policy could depend on their own social composition and on the traditions of the area.⁽¹¹⁾ In Manchester the city council was under the control of men schooled in a civic gospel and convinced of the benefits of "social equipoise and negotiated concessions".⁽¹²⁾ They were enthusiastic in the expansion of housing and educational facilities. But when government nationally sought retrenchment Manchester's councillors were reluctant to conform. Sheffield,

9. K Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society*, pp233-234

10. J Dale, *Class Struggle Social Policy and State Structure: Central-Local Relations in Housing Policy 1919-1939* in J Melling, Housing Social Policy and the State (1980) pp195-199

11. J Dale, *Class Struggle Social Policy and State Structure*, pp201-202

12. J Melling, Introduction to J Melling, Housing Social Policy and the State, p9

on the contrary, was slow to react to state encouragement to public spending.⁽¹³⁾ In a study of Birmingham and Sheffield Boughton has attributed the marked differences between the attitudes of civic leaders in the two cities to class and local tradition. Birmingham like Manchester had a history of municipal activity and was still under the control of prominent industrialists. Sheffield was dominated by shopkeeper councillors whose principal interest was to keep down the rates.⁽¹⁴⁾ But lower middle class involvement in the municipality did not always indicate a reluctance to act. As Birch found in Glossop, lower middle class councillors were to the forefront in promoting municipal efforts to encourage new industry into the area in the 1920's.⁽¹⁵⁾

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the size and national status of firms did not necessarily lead to a lack of interest in local affairs amongst industrialists. Some recent work on industrial relations and welfare policies in industry have questioned earlier assumptions about the demise of paternalism in twentieth century firms. Roger Charles, for example, has designated the years between 1911 and 1921 as ones in which there was a new and innovative spirit. Employers were motivated by a greater sense of the possibilities of reconciling the interests of employer and employee. He argues that these years saw the development of "co-operative norms"⁽¹⁶⁾ based on a recognition of the validity of the interests of both sides of industry. Such views found political expression in the immediately post Great War period. Both industrialists and politicians were then seeking to emphasise the joint interests of management and labour and there were

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- 13. J Boughton, Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield 1918-1931 Phd thesis, University of Warwick, 1985, p228
 - 14. J Boughton, Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield, pp222 and 228
 - 15. A H Birch, Small Town Politics, p31
 - 16. R Charles, The Development of Industrial Relations in Britain 1911-1939 (1973) pp27-32

attempts to construct 'industrial parliaments' and forums for co-operation between firms in the same industry.⁽¹⁷⁾ Middlemas has dismissed much of the atmosphere in the business community at this time as "naive industrial corporatism"⁽¹⁸⁾ and argued that the locus of power in relation to the state was in NCEO and excluded the mass of smaller firms organised in chambers of commerce and other trade associations and federations. But whilst he is obviously correct in attributing the major influence on government industrial policy to the directors of large scale industry, he possibly underestimates the role played by smaller firms in the process of negotiating class interests in the wider society.

Tony Mason and Bill Lancaster's recent study of Coventry has drawn attention to the welfare policies in two firms operating in that city. Courtaulds the textile giant, might be regarded as an example of the type of firm usually expected to have conciliatory industrial relations policies and a 'scientific' attitude to personnel management. But Alfred Herbert Ltd, a machine tool company, was not a recently established or consumer orientated firm and it had a largely male workforce. The random benevolence of the Herbert family in the nineteenth century was replaced in the 1920's by a consciously paternalistic management style.⁽¹⁹⁾ Such examples re-enforce Helen Jones argument that rather than viewing the nineteenth century as the heyday of paternalism it should be understood that "welfare schemes expanded on an unprecedented scale from the mid 1920's".⁽²⁰⁾ The existence of a 1920's welfare movement in industry does not of itself prove that employers continued to create the kind of conditions in the firm or, more importantly,

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17. C Wrigley, In the Excess of Their Patriotism. The National Party and Threats of Subversion in C Wrigley, Warfare Diplomacy and Politics (1986), p109
 18. K Middlemas, Politics in Industrial Society, p20
 19. J McG Davies, A Twentieth Century Paternalist. Alfred Herbert and the Skilled Coventry Workman in B Lancaster and T Mason, Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City (Coventry 1986), pp98-99
 20. H Jones, Employers Welfare Schemes and Industrial Relations in Interwar Britain in Business History Vol XXV, no 1 March 1983, pp61-62

in the town, conducive to an employer led civic culture. Studies of the relationships between businesses and the towns in which they operated are ambiguous in this respect. Fidler's work on the British business elite of the 1970's acknowledges that the level of participation of business leaders in local politics seems to have been in decline throughout the twentieth century but the evidence in his study suggests a particular decline post World War II.⁽²¹⁾ As he points out other studies have concluded that businessmen and higher professionals have continued to dominate local councils and voluntary organisation. The owners of small firms have a persistent record of involvement. Fidler concludes that there has been a fall off in participation over time regardless of the size of firm concerned, but that at any given point in the period before 1975 between one-third and a half of all businessmen were engaged in some political and charitable work.

Professor Buswell offers a different perspective on the relationships possible between firms and the locality of their operations. Looking at the whole of the period between 1880 and 1939, he argues that there were particular conditions which produced socially responsible behaviour in some organisations. The size of the firm and the type of ownership were only some of the factors involved. He summarises these conditions as "minimal stability, social proximity, a high degree of public visibility and conformable size".⁽²²⁾ He points, for example, to Marks and Spencer as a business of this type. The type of area in which the firm was positioned could affect its policies. The main scene for business gifts

21. J Fidler, The British Business Elite (1981), p222

22. Prof. J Buswell, The Informal Social Control of Business in Britain 1880-1939 in Business History Review, Special Issue, Harvard 1983, p245

to local communities was a "vigorous, appropriately sized city, town or region" in which there were stable relationships with "customers, neighbours, workers and business peers".⁽²³⁾ The expansion of welfare activity in industry and the enhanced role of local authorities after the Great War suggests that at least some of the ingredients of 'town patriotism' described by Joyce were still present in interwar Britain. Indeed, it could be argued that the experience of war and the extension of the franchise produced new incentives for the reassertion of community values. Industrialists were as concerned as their nineteenth century counterparts to justify their position and legitimise their autocratic powers. In towns and cities where no single industrial giant dominated the local economy there were numerous incentives for participation in charitable and political work. Social pressures could also have been complemented by the notion of economic advantage. The municipal housing programme, for example, was often an important element in bringing national finance into the urban economy. Studies of local government seem to indicate that localism was a substantial influence on the attitudes of elected members of interwar Councils. As Young points out coalition arrangements between Conservative and Liberal associations for municipal elections were often persisted in despite the advice of national Party managers. Whereas local elections were seen by Conservative Party headquarters as mere rehearsals for parliamentary contests, the participants shared a cross party distaste for partisanship being displayed in local politics.⁽²⁴⁾ Despite the fact that Socialist and Labour interventions had shattered much of the illusion of nonparty local government, the "dignified element"⁽²⁵⁾ in Council tradition continued to offer a means of stressing social unity. The Mayoralty, the

23. Prof. J Buswell, *The Informal Social Control of Business*, p246

24. K Young, Local Politics and the Rise of Party (Leicester 1975), p32

25. C Pearce, The Machinery of Change in Local Government 1888-1974 (1980), p158

freedom of the borough and other similar institutions remained possible sources of support for promoting a community ethos. Though Joyce has argued that the town electorate became more orientated toward class and national influences in the twentieth century, it seems likely that localism was still a factor in their political values. Neighbourhood studies offer ambiguous information on this point. Elizabeth Roberts' work suggests that the 1930's saw the beginning of a breakdown in the solidaristic values of working class neighbourhoods and the growth of a more instrumental and individualistic mentality.⁽²⁶⁾ Her conclusions are tentative and based on the more prosperous life style of some working class neighbourhoods. It could be argued that the intervention of the state in the provision of old age pensions, unemployment benefit and maternity services as well as housing had some influence on this type of development. But Joyce's theory that northern factory workers identified with the family firm and through it with their town was not based on the internal solidarities of working class communities. It was rather predicated on the role of outside forces in creating a sense of dependence. The employers who were most successful in cultivating this atmosphere were not the close neighbours of their employees. The very social distance between giver and receiver added to the sense that the employers were the legitimate leaders of society.⁽²⁷⁾ Though working class families may have had less experience of personal charity from their employers in the twentieth century they were still the recipients of outside help if in a more organised and impersonal form. Their attitude to that experience must surely have been conditioned by the ability of firms and local government institutions to create an ethos equivalent to the benevolence Joyce describes.

26. E Roberts, A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940 (1984), pp195-199

27. P Joyce, Work Society and Politics, p161

If community values were present amongst the electorate then there is some justification for reassessing the pattern of interwar voting behaviour. Labour's acquisition of just under half of the working class vote between 1918 and 1939 has usually been seen as evidence of an increasing sense of class identity. Hobsbawm, for example, has described Labour's vote as the result of cumulative changes producing a more nationally homogeneous working class subculture.⁽²⁸⁾ In the nineteenth century working men defined themselves in terms of occupational and parochial identities, but as time went by they began to see themselves as part of nationwide working class. Pugh has argued that the growth in the Labour vote simply followed from the decline of the Liberal Party.⁽²⁹⁾ But he nonetheless suggests that the Liberals gained and lost working class support in response to the voters' perception of class interest. It was the Liberals' redefinition as a party of the middle class, in the period of the national coalition which allowed the Labour Party to rise. Even if we accept that the Labour voter of the interwar period was class conscious it is clear that the majority of the electorate were influenced by other values. As Pugh has pointed out the Conservatives were successful for the majority of these years in two thirds of those constituencies with an average class composition of 80% to 90% manual workers and 10% to 19.9% middle class. They even retained some seats in areas where the working class dominance of the electorate was unusually high and less than 10% of the electorate was middle class.⁽³⁰⁾ The incompleteness of the transition to class based voting has been the subject of numerous studies in the post 1945 period. Most of these have concentrated on the characteristics of the deferential Conservative voter and suggested

28. E Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour (1984), pp194-213

29. M Pugh, The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939 (1982), pp256-259

30. M Pugh, The Making of Modern British Politics, pp248-249

that the values held by this group were distinctly patriotic and hierarchical. Despite the evidence of persistent regional and localised trends in voting habits⁽³¹⁾ less attention has been paid to community based values as an influence on behaviour.

One of the differences observed between post World War II voters is that Labour voters have been much more inclined to see the upper class as "unfair". In McKenzie and Silver's 1968 sample only 19% of Conservative voters agreed with the proposition that "the upper class in Britain have always tried to keep the working class from getting their fair share" but 64% of Labour voters did so.⁽³²⁾ Making due allowance for the fact that the electorate of 1968 is not that of the 1920's and 1930's it seems reasonable to assume a similar division of opinion in interwar Britain. The attitudes of Conservative voters reflect the values encouraged in the corporatist state described by Middlemas.⁽³³⁾ But in the light of the different levels of Labour voting in localities it also appears possible such attitudes were undermined or had more consequence in certain local circumstances. The industrial relations policies of firms operating in the area, the public image of the resident middle class and the level of municipal welfare provision could all be seen as affecting political values. The examination of a relationship between voting and the characteristics of the local state is complicated by the fact that the interwar years were dominated by three Party clashes. The slow decline of Liberalism still left many voters with the option of voting for a party with a history of association with religious and regional interests. The Liberals' tenacious hold in some areas has indeed been explained in terms of the continuing relevance of religion

31. R McKenzie and A Silver, Angels in Marble (1968), pp183-184

32. R McKenzie and A Silver, Angels in Marble, p135

33. K Middlemas, Politics in Industrial Society, p234

to Party loyalties. Kinnear has pointed to the correlation between areas of high Liberal voting with both a relatively large non conformist group in the population and a greater than average proportion of middle class residents.⁽³⁴⁾ But there are disagreements among political scientists and historians about the influence of non-conformism on voting behaviour. Whilst some, like Kinnear and Pugh, emphasise the way it inhibited a trend toward Conservative voting amongst certain elements of the middle class others argue that working class non-conformists were more likely to vote Conservative than Labour once Liberalism was in decline.⁽³⁵⁾ Yet there is also a body of opinion which links the rise of Labour in the 1920's very closely to the conversion of the respectable, skilled and non conformist working class from Liberalism to Labour.⁽³⁶⁾ On the basis of this admittedly tenuous evidence I intend to suggest that the influence of religion could have had quite different results from area to area. It could, on the one hand, produce a highly consensual atmosphere or on the other, make divisions within the middle class particularly obvious. A religiously and politically divided middle class might find it difficult to establish local social hegemony. It is the state's ability to set the tone for the political debate and define the legitimate boundaries of conflict which Castles, like Middlemas, sees as characteristic of British politics from the early part of the twentieth century. Contrasting the success of Scandinavian social democratic parties with the slow and halting growth of the British Labour Party he has argued that the former had the advantage of facing a middle class divided by religion, sectional interest and Party politics.⁽³⁷⁾ Taking this theory to its logical conclusion it could be argued that local political and social elites had more control over the values of the population when they were united than when they were divided.

34. M Kinnear, The British Voter (1968), pp125-127

35. G Alderman, British Elections Myth and Reality (1978), pp157-158

36. C Cook, The Age of Alignment (1975), pp20-21

37. F G Castles, The Social Democratic Image of Society (1978), p127

Castle's theory also highlights some other variables of interest in assessing the role of civic culture in affecting values and voting behaviour. It suggests an explanation of the rise of the Labour vote in areas where an employer led civic culture was strong. In Birmingham, As John Boughton has pointed out the Labour vote rose significantly after 1926. As he notes this was the stage at which local Conservative policy seemed most at odds with the rhetoric of the Party nationally.⁽³⁸⁾ For a working class voter schooled in a community ethos and in a belief in the fairness of employers and establishment politicians the spectacle of state force being mobilised against trade unionists could have been a decisive factor in changing voting habits. But conflict between norms established at the town or city level and the activities of central governments may also have been of significance in other ways. As Samuel and Stedman Jones have pointed out there are large gaps in the research on the "local culture" of Labour.⁽³⁹⁾ The movement for 'history from below' has concentrated to a great extent on the period before World War I. Much of that work has been seen as the rediscovery of an era of local Socialist autonomy and has depicted the interaction between those political activists and a working class subculture. There have been some suggestions that such an organic relationship between Labour Party activists and working class neighbourhoods continued in the 1920's and 1930's. Hindess was at one time the principal proponent of this view.⁽⁴⁰⁾ But though Jeremy Seabrook has continued to offer an explanation of the decline of Labour based on the loss of contact between activists and working class collectivist values,⁽⁴¹⁾ detailed studies have tended to discount the existence of a neighbourhood political focus. Tom Forrester, for example, has argued that interwar Labour Party Wards and Constituency Parties were merely electoral organisations.⁽⁴²⁾ He has drawn attention to

38. J Boughton, *Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield*, pp198-203

39. R Samuel and G Stedman Jones, *The Labour Party and Social Democracy* in R Samuel and G Stedman Jones *Culture Ideology and Politics* (1983), pp321-322

40. B Hindess, *The Decline of Working Class Politics* (1971), p12

41. J Seabrook, *What Went Wrong?* (1978), p244

42. T Forrester, *The Labour Party and the Working Class* (1976), pp88-90

the way that activists and Councillors have been drawn from amongst the white collar sector. But relatively little attention has been paid to the possibility that both Labour activists and working class voters were engaged in a common value system based on the town community. My own research into the ideology of the Northampton Labour Party in the 1920's and 1930's⁽⁴³⁾ first suggested the possibility that the beliefs and behaviour of activists could be as much influenced by the town environment as by trends of thought in the wider labour movement. Boughton's more recent study of Sheffield and Birmingham⁽⁴⁴⁾ has placed the labour movements of these two cities in the context of their social environment. There is some acknowledgement in this work of the limits of even an activist subculture. But Boughton's study like that of Wyncoll in Nottingham and⁽⁴⁵⁾ Lancaster and Mason in Coventry⁽⁴⁶⁾ do not directly confront the possibility of a town culture integrating labour movement, working class voters and the middle class in a common value system. Yet a number of political scientists and historians have acknowledged the way in which local activists appealed to the electorate not on the basis of enhancing class consciousness but by conforming to more acceptable and traditional values.⁽⁴⁷⁾

An exploration of the local dimension of interwar political values naturally lends itself to a local study. The choice of Northampton as the appropriate venue for such a study has been largely coincidental. Having previously looked at the town's Labour Party I was aware of an atmosphere that suggested the existence of a town culture. In the 1970's I was an elected member of Northampton Borough Council and became part of a local government subculture which still demonstrated highly consensual tendencies. At the very early

43. M Dickie, *The Ideology of the Northampton Labour Party in the Interwar Years*
M A thesis, University of Warwick, 1982, p14

44. J Boughton, *Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield*

45. P Wyncoll, *The Nottingham Labour Movement 1880-1939* (1985)

46. B Lancaster and T Mason, *Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City*
(Coventry 1986)

47. T Forrester, *The Labour Party and the Working Class*, p37

stage of research it became clear that the choice of Northampton had both advantages and disadvantages. Northampton is a Midland town and between 1918 and 1939 had a population of about 90,000.⁽⁴⁸⁾ It was a medium sized industrial town. There had been little new immigration after 1900 and the depression years did not see any large scale emigration. The population was a stable one, predominantly native born. According to Kinnear its social composition and religious preferences were by no means unusual. Around 80% of its occupied workforce were manual workers and just under 20% were in white collar or professional jobs.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Until 1932 the Borough Council and Parliamentary boundary were approximately the same.⁽⁵⁰⁾ After 1918 Northampton ceased to be a two-member constituency. These factors could all be seen as of benefit in analysing local voting behaviour. Furthermore, Northampton elected Labour MP's in 1923 and again in a by-election in 1928, returning the same MP for the 1929 to 1931 Parliament. It was represented by a Liberal in the immediate post Great War years but for the majority of the period there were Conservative MPs.⁽⁵¹⁾ In terms of parliamentary representation the constituency was apparently subject to all the recognised trends in interwar voting behaviour. The composition of the Borough Council was more unusual. The Labour group remained the third and smallest group on the council until 1937 when it moved into second place. Cook has noted Northampton as an example of an area where Liberalism maintained some hold on municipal election loyalty.⁽⁵²⁾ But despite prewar associations between the strength of liberalism and non conformity⁽⁵³⁾ all over the East Midlands Kinnear does not include Northampton amongst those towns with a particularly high level of 'free church' religious affiliation in 1921.⁽⁵⁴⁾ My own past

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48. ----- Census Reports on Northampton 1921, 1931, 1951 (there was no detailed census taken in 1941)
49. M Kinnear, *The British Voter*, pp122-123
50. Ordinance Survey Map of Northampton 1936
51. F W S Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949 (1983)pp50-55
52. C Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p64
53. H Pelling, The Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (1967) pp110-115
54. M Kinnear, *The British Voter*, pp129

research has shown that the SDF and ILP helped form Northampton Labour Party.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Like the abnormalities of municipal politics, this situation might be of benefit to the research. Labour Parties created under the guidance of pre-existing socialist societies can be expected to have a more class conscious ideology than those brought into being simply as an extension of trade unionism.⁽⁵⁶⁾

The major disadvantages in choosing Northampton for this study have proved to be in the lack of both primary and secondary research material. Until recently there has been little local interest in the town's social history. Records of some of the political parties in Northampton have been lost without trace. The NLA's records have disappeared. NCLP's records, still held by the Party, have large gaps. Northampton Corporation documents have survived better but they provide only a dry account of decisions made at full Council meetings. Committee minutes have only rarely been preserved. There is more information available on local industry and employers. Both the Northampton Central Museum and reference library have concentrated on the collection of documents relating to the shoe industry, which was the mainstay of the town economy prior to 1945. The charities and voluntary organisations which operated in Northampton in the 1920's and 1930's have left only incomplete accounts of their activities. It has been necessary to rely very heavily on the local press for evidence in almost every field. But this in itself has proved useful. One facet of the evidence for the existence of a political culture of town patriotism might otherwise have been left underexplored. The continuing importance of the local press in creating and sustaining community feeling has been given less weight than that of the popular national press in setting the interwar political agenda.

55. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, pp20-24

56. R McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924* (1975), p127

But as Shorter noted in his East Midlands study Party organisations in the localities at the time considered the town based media very influential.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The problem of the poverty of secondary sources has remained an unrelieved difficulty.

The literature on Northampton's history is dominated by works that were designed to provide popular guides to the major events in the town's life. They concentrate on its early history as an important trading centre and are of little assistance in ascertaining more than the barest outlines of its economy, social structure or municipal atmosphere in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. With the exception of Foster's comparative study of nineteenth century Oldham, Shields and Northampton⁽⁵⁸⁾ and Royle's assessment of Northampton's politics in relation to the political career of Bradlaugh⁽⁵⁹⁾ there is little detailed material. Damaris Rose's work on working class homeownership in Britain before the first World War has been of some help in relating interwar culture to some of its origins in nineteenth century conditions.⁽⁶⁰⁾ But Brooker's promised study of the political and social attitudes of Northamptonshire shoemakers during industrialisation is still incomplete and unavailable.⁽⁶¹⁾

The lack of secondary source material has meant spending some considerable time on filling in the background of Northampton's history before 1918. As the first and second chapters indicate the ethos of town patriotism described owed much to tradition and to conditions established before the first World War. In the historical overview, with which the thesis begins,

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- 57. P S Shorter, Electoral Politics and Political Change in the East Midlands, Phd thesis, University of Cambridge, 1975, pp100-101
 - 58. J Foster, Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution (1974) pp73-165
 - 59. E Royle, Charles Bradlaugh Freethought and Northampton in Northampton Past and Present Vol VI no 3 1980, pp141-150
 - 60. D Rose, Home Ownership Uneven Development and Industrial Change in late Nineteenth Century Britain, Phd thesis, University of Sussex, 1984, pp267-322
 - 61. K Brooker, The Northamptonshire Shoemakers Reaction to Industrialisation: Some Thoughts in NPP Vol VI no 3 1980 pp151-159 and K Brooker, James Gribble and the Raunds Strike of 1905 in NPP Vol IV no 5 1981-1982, pp275-290 offer previews of the so far incomplete thesis

as much of that influence is shown as has proved possible within the constraints described. In the following chapter the more modern influences on the values of key contributors to the public culture are described. Some mention is also made of the role of the municipality but the most important element in this chapter is the role of non-governmental organisations, industrial, charitable and cultural. The special contribution of the municipality is discussed in detail in chapter 3. In that chapter a particular emphasis is placed on the experience of Councillors of all parties. The labour movement's subculture and its capacity to influence the working class electorate is assessed in the next chapter. Finally, the voting behaviour of the Northampton electorate is explored in the context of neighbourhood, occupational and public culture influences. In the conclusion there is *some attempt made* to relate the Northampton evidence to other work on the politics of the interwar years.

CHAPTER 1

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this study is the years between 1918 and 1939 and the evidence for the existence of 'town patriotism' in that period. However, towns and communities do not spring into life overnight. Although Northampton people may have been only vaguely aware of their own heritage it nonetheless affected their lives. It shaped the physical and economic structure of the town. The social and religious forms established were available to be built upon for new purposes. The memories and myths about times past were reference points for what was normal and acceptable. In the following pages an attempt will be made to draw out those features of Northampton's history which formed the foundation for interwar community culture. The outlines of the 1918 to 1939 economic and social structure will also be shown. In the course of this chapter note will be taken of the kind of social and economic characteristics which Joyce found in nineteenth century textile towns. For example, Joyce draws attention to the development of prosperous, 'new paternalist' employer class in the 1850's and 1860's and to the decline of the factory culture in the 1890's.⁽¹⁾ He suggests that the arrival of socialist intervention in local politics and trade unions in the 1880's marked the beginning of a breach in community values.⁽²⁾ If there were parallel trends in Northampton it would clearly be of importance to recognise them and explore their impact on later events.

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1. P Joyce, Work Society and Politics, pp136-137
 2. P Joyce, Work Society and Politics, p335

ECONOMY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Northampton's history as an industrial town began in the early 1800's. From the twelfth to the fourteenth century it had been an important centre of trade, politics and religious life for the country as a whole.⁽³⁾ The crafts which had become established in that period continued to flourish as Northampton became orientated toward serving its County market. Cloth weaving and dying declined but shoemaking and ironworking occupied many of its inhabitants and trade remained the basis of the town's prosperity. The first wave of the industrial revolution passed Northampton by, despite efforts to revive its earlier textile tradition. It was the outbreak of the Napoleonic wars which helped to transform a local cottage craft into an industry serving the national market. Until that time the mass production of boots and shoes had been confined to London, where merchants had access to large orders from government. As the demand for army boots increased these merchants found their usual sources of supply inadequate and diverted orders to Midland towns like Northampton, where there was some tradition of shoemaking. The high demand for footwear coincided with an agricultural depression and there was a ready supply of cheap, local labour. It was, however, largely unskilled. By the time the Napoleonic wars ended, Northampton had become established as a centre of production for cheap, low quality boots.

The demand for army boots was succeeded by an expanding market for mass produced boots in the Empire. In response Northampton's population rose rapidly from around 7000 in 1801 to 33000 in 1851⁽⁴⁾ and the number of shoemakers increased ten fold. By the middle of the century over half of

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3. R L Greenall, A History of Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough (1979), pp35-38
 4. J Foster, Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution, p76

Northampton families were dependent on the shoe industry. At the same time the opening of the Grand Junction canal in 1815 encouraged greater exploitation of local iron ore deposits and stimulated the growth of the ironworking industry. Although Northampton remained the County trading centre it became primarily an industrial town. The shoemaking industry in Britain did not become factory based until the 1890's.⁽⁵⁾ Thus the majority of its workforce were semi-skilled outworkers with pretensions to craftsman status not factory operatives. The industry in Northampton continued under the control of wholesale merchants based in London, with local agents acting as intermediaries for them. Industrial change therefore did not initially bring about the creation of a new class of wealthy men in the town. Tradesmen, professionals, small masters in ironworking and boot agents formed a large homogeneous group in the population. Until the early twentieth century there were no industrial giants standing out from the mass by virtue of size, wealth or economic dominance. Sub division in the shoemaking craft, made necessary both by mass production and the poverty of skill locally, added to the fluidity of class lines in Northampton. During the Napoleonic wars the London merchants had begun to employ middlemen or agents to purchase supplies of leather and provide warehouse facilities. These men soon began to employ 'clickers' to work on the warehouse premises cutting out the leather parts. As the trade became further sub divided some of these skilled workers also joined the ranks of the employers. Even before the industrial sewing machine had begun to mechanise the industry in the 1850's it had become common practice for clickers to sub-contract the sewing stage of process from their employers and engage women and girls to carry it out. The increased productivity brought about by the use of

5. A Fox, A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957, (Oxford 1958), p143

the sewing machine brought new wealth and position to the agents and the growing ranks of sub-contractors but it also swelled the ranks of very small scale independent employers. The American sewing machine companies introduced this product to the British shoe industry and keen to penetrate the market, they leased rather than sold the machinery. Entry to the trade was not restricted by high capital costs for machinery or premises. New 'manufacturers', as they now called themselves, were constantly moving into the industry. When the demand for shoes was high their number increased. But many fell by the wayside as demand declined. Some of the aspiring industrialists were clicker sub-contractors, others were 'bespoke' shoemakers with a real claim to craftman status. Outworkers shaping the shoe uppers also began to employ labour and occasionally move into the ranks of the manufacturers. Most *'upper makers'* found it advantageous to employ boy 'apprentices' or assistants to speed up their work and keep pace with the demand created by the faster rate of sewing.

Both the nature of local industry and Northampton's County town trade gave it the appearance of having a large middle class. According to Foster the middle class represented 26% of all household heads in 1849 by comparison with 20% in Oldham and Shields.⁽⁶⁾

Neighbouring between families of different social status was high, whereas in comparable factory towns distinct and segregated working class neighbourhoods were already common. But Northampton's outworkers were by no means prosperous. Again Foster's comparative study of Oldham, Shields

6. J Foster, *Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution*, p76

and Northampton is indicative. He found that at mid-century primary poverty was more widespread in Northampton than either of the other two towns.⁽⁷⁾

The constant influx of new workers from the surrounding countryside made Northampton a town of young, immigrant workers until well into the 1870's. The competition for employment was intense and often disastrous, in an industry subject to heavy seasonal and cyclical fluctuations in demand.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, but particularly from the late 1880's, there were changes in the Northampton economy which transformed the town's social structure and brought great improvements in the standard of living of its people. The first signs of this can be found in the housing boom which occurred from the 1860's onwards.^(fig 1) Northampton expanded rapidly, spreading outward from its medieval borough boundary. In the 1880's and 1890's Northampton building societies claimed to have built two-thirds of the town's existing artisan housing and to be responsible for the creation of 3000 working class home owners. In fact, in the 1880's,⁽⁸⁾ only 5% of lower middle class and working class housing in Northampton was occupied by the property's owner. The majority of owner-occupiers were small tradesmen, clerical workers and skilled craftsmen. The societies' claims were grossly exaggerated, based on the assumption that all the freehold properties they had built were for personal occupation. Yet the level of building does indicate that many lower middle class families had money to invest in buying their own house and in becoming petty landlords. It also suggests that outworkers increasingly had sufficient income to afford the higher rents charged for new housing. The contribution to housing made by the building

7. J Foster, *Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution*, p96

8. D Rose, *Homeownership and Uneven Development*, p272

societies and the late start which had been made in providing purpose built accommodation for artisans did lead to a relatively high standard of housing. A poverty survey in 1911 noted the prevalence of the six-room house in Northampton in contrast to the average of four or five rooms elsewhere.⁽⁹⁾

The improvement in housing conditions which began in the 1860's was followed by a genuine increase in the proportion of home owners. There was a large increase in the number of lower middle class and middle class owner occupiers. By 1925 just under 50% of all housing with a rateable value of £14+ was owner occupied. In all approximately 22% of Northampton housing fell into this category but of the 78% which had a rateable value of £13 or below only 14% was owner occupied.^(table 1)

The special spur to these developments in housing had been given by changing conditions in the boot and shoe industry. In 1886 the NURF began an organising drive in the town. The Union had been formed in the 1870's as a breakaway for the Cordwainers Society to meet the needs of a growing band of male shoe factory operatives. The rivetting machine had been the first aspect of mechanisation to affect male workers and to undermine their outworker status. Though it was first adopted in London its use was gradually spreading to the provinces and the lack of union agreements there, had serious implications for London operatives. The NURF's intervention in Northampton led to a town wide 'lockout'.⁽¹⁰⁾ For merchants, sub-contractors, factory operatives and outworkers the dispute had major long-term consequences. Some Northampton agents had already started to transform their

9. A L Bowley and A R Burnett-Hurst, Livelihood and Poverty: A Study of the Economic Conditions of Working Class Households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley and Reading (1915), p56

10. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp101-104

warehouses into factories. They were intent on overcoming the traditional resistance of Northampton shoeworkers to working on their employers premises and conforming to factory discipline. The more farsighted manufacturers were also anxious to end the pattern of intense competition for orders which had been produced by the low costs of entry into the industry. After a bitter and prolonged dispute the NBSMA agreed to increase rates of pay for rivetters and finishers. More importantly, the manufacturers came to terms with the union for a joint campaign against outworking.

Between 1886 and 1895 the structure of the boot and shoe industry in Northampton changed radically. Some of the better established merchants agents began to build large factories on the outskirts of the town.^{fig 2} Many sub-contractors found themselves squeezed out of the industry. Others accepted the new conditions and began to build factories of their own. The implications of the change can be recognised in the claims of the Secretary of the NBSMA that of the 50 members of the association in 1929, only 12 had been in business before 1885.^{11} Factory based production provided the basis for the emergence of a new, smaller and more prosperous industrial elite. It also reduced the status of many erstwhile sub-contractors and outworkers. According to Damaris Rose it is this latter event that had led to the surge in homeownership in Northampton. To retain some measure of independence, she argues, those unable to compete for the position of manufacturer ventured into petty landlordism and home ownership. Some purchased homes with a workshop attached in an attempt to avoid the interference of the factory inspectors. The building of home-workshops certainly flourished at the same time as much larger factories were being

11. E Bordoli, Northampton Town Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Association Jubilee Publication (1929), p6

erected. However, this may be a better indicator of the limits of the drive for factory-based production, than resistance to change. Despite the tendency to concentration in the industry there was still plenty of opportunity for small businessmen to work on the margins of the trade. The new larger scale manufacturers were still willing to sub-contract work out in periods of high demand. Closing or sewing was a particularly volatile element in the production process. The number of workers required depended on fashion as well as the overall level of demand for shoes. It remained more practical to sub-contract such work out rather than increase the number of machines and operatives in the factory.⁽¹²⁾

Advances in mechanisation in the shoe industry were accompanied by other opportunities for the lower middle class. Some of the town's small foundries, manufacturing agricultural equipment for the County, began to diversify into the design and production of shoe machinery. New skills were developed in the field of precision and electrical engineering. For most engineering firms this experimental attempt to work for the boot and shoe industry was short lived. The American shoe machinery manufacturers had an effective hold on the market. But as the bicycle and motor vehicle industry expanded in the West Midlands⁽¹³⁾ Northampton was ideally placed to take advantage of it. From the early twentieth century Northampton's small engineering firms concentrated on the production of specialist parts and on the luxury end of the market. Local garages and carriage builders turned over to making custom made body work for Rolls Royce and Daimler cars. Northampton gained several new, small firms which became the most

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12. ----- Kelly's Directory of Trades for Northamptonshire (1924 and 1933) lists boot closers and upper makers separately from boot and shoe manufacturers.
 13. D M Brooks, Technical Education and Apprenticeships 1950-1856, M.Ed thesis, University of Leicester, 1970, part XV, sec 2, p8

important of its engineering companies in the interwar years. H W Dover Ltd, which made bicycle parts, Grose Ltd in motor body work manufacture and Bassett Lowke Ltd the maker of scale model electrical engines were among the most prominent.⁽¹⁴⁾ But only one large engineering firm migrated into the area from outside the town. The London company, Smith, Major and Stevens Ltd (later Express Lift Ltd), moved into Northampton in the early 1900's. Its lifts and hoists had become a vital part of shoe factory equipment. The slight diversification of industry in Northampton which followed the mechanisation of shoe manufacture, was not due only to the development of a more sophisticated engineering base. There was also a number of new and expanding firms in printing. Some of them had been engaged in making cardboard boxes for shoe packaging. But others, like the engineering firms, were formed to meet the new types of demand in the industry. The limited concentration which shoe manufacturers had been able to achieve in the 1880's and 1890's had encouraged some of the more prosperous shoe firms to turn their attention to retailing in the European and home market. Manfield and Sons and Bostock (Lotus Ltd) led the way, building on the merchanting expertise they had gained since the 1830's and 1840's.⁽¹⁵⁾ But two new companies, Barratt Bros Ltd and Sears (Truform) Ltd exhibited a flair for advertising and salesmanship which by 1914 placed them on a par with these much older firms.⁽¹⁶⁾ The demands for printed advertising material expanded in the early 1900's as a result of the shoe industry's new interest in retailing and the continued competition between wholesalers. Unlike the engineers, printers remained largely dependent on the shoe trade for custom. But, the three most successful printing firms founded in the early twentieth century consolidated their position by moving

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14. M F Collins, Changes in Land Use in the Borough of Northampton, B Letters thesis, Trinity College, p132
 15. E W Burnham, A Century of Shoemaking (unpublished manuscript dated 1944), pp56-59
 16. J B McAndrew, The Boot and Shoe Industry in Financial Review of Reviews 1936, p100

into fine art printing and music publishing after the war.⁽¹⁷⁾ The Northampton building industry and its suppliers were beneficiaries of the shoe industry's late nineteenth century and early twentieth century reorganisation. The six leading building firms in the town during the interwar years were those which had emerged as the factory builders of the 1890's and 1900's.⁽¹⁸⁾ As a spin-off from the growth of the consumer market nationally and the vitality of the local building trade some other small firms were established. Bell's Firegrate Company,⁽¹⁹⁾ which started business as a supplier of material to the building trade and the Rest Assured Mattress Company,⁽²⁰⁾ are amongst the most notable. Thus, from the turn of the century Northampton began to acquire a group of large scale industrialists, and a range of stable medium sized firms in shoemaking, printing and engineering. But there were still a very large number of small and precarious businesses. In the 1920's the fifty member firms of the NBSMA, including the four shoemaking-retailing empires, employed around two-thirds of Northampton shoe operatives. There were, however, a further 200 very small manufacturing units employing less than 1000 workers between them. In addition there were over 100 independent tanneries and 50 manufacturers of shoe accessories in the town. Printing, building and engineering firms added another 150 small firms to the total.⁽²¹⁾

The lower middle class, which had played a large part in the Northampton economy in the past, continued to be numerous. In 1921 they accounted for just under 20% of the occupied population⁽²²⁾ but they were an expanding

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- 17. Northampton Reference Library Local Collection on John Dickens & Co Ltd and Clarke and Sherwell Ltd
 - 18. D M Brooks, Technical Education and Apprenticeships, Part XV, sec 10, pp12-17
 - 19. Romance of Industry series in Mercury and Herald, 21st December 1956
 - 20. Romance of Industry series in Mercury and Herald, 5th October 1956
 - 21. M F Collins, Changes in Land Use, pp130-131
 - 22. M Kinnear, The British Voter, pp125-127

rather than a contracting group. By 1931 the census records show that they made up 22% of the workforce.⁽²³⁾ Some contraction in the number of small manufacturers was compensated for by a growth in both white collar employment and shopkeeping. National and multiple retailing units began to move into Northampton in the 1900's but this still left plenty of room for the creation of new locally based shops and the expansion of the activities of longer established tradesmen. Between 1911 and 1921 the workforce in commerce had doubled. There was a very large increase in the ranks of female shop assistants but nonetheless over one-third of those recorded as working in shops in 1931 were the owners or managers of the business.⁽²⁴⁾ As elsewhere, the Co-operative Society pioneered the development of multiple retailing and food manufacture.⁽²⁵⁾ But although the Co-operative bakery was a major force on the Northampton scene, other local bakery businesses were also expanding their operations.⁽²⁶⁾ Northampton's two breweries continued to provide strong support for a number of small shops.⁽²⁷⁾ The off license franchises granted to the shops guaranteed a basic income.

The mechanisation of the shoe industry and the slight industrial diversification which accompanied it consolidated the prosperity of the middle class, but it also began the twentieth century trend toward Northampton becoming less of a manufacturing town. Whereas the boot and shoe industry had previously been responsible for the employment of over half the workforce its demand for labour was now contracting. This development was partially concealed by a boom in demand in the industry between 1911 and 1918 but by

23. Census Report 1931

24. Census Report 1911, 1921, 1931

25. W B Wright, Northampton Co-operative Society Seventy Five Years History 1870-1945 (Northampton 1945), p63

26. Northamptonshire PRO Collection, The Adams Papers

27. M F Collins, Changes in Land Use, p128

1931 only a third of the occupied were boot and shoe workers.^(fig 3) The industry still accounted for around half of all manufacturing employment. It was not until the late 1930's, with the onset of war production, that the engineering sector showed a real expansion in its demand for labour.⁽²⁸⁾ For the majority of the years between 1918 and 1939 the service sector (trade, distribution and clerical) was rather more buoyant than manufacture. The small increase in the ranks of the lower middle class was paralleled by a movement of manual workers into jobs in warehousing, transport and lower level shop and office work.

Larger scale industrialists like the Manfields and the Bostocks began to move out of Northampton into estates in the countryside at the turn of the century.⁽²⁹⁾ Up until the 1880's the building societies had been responsible for the development of mixed estates of working class and lower middle class housing. But in 1890's to 1900's they began to cater more exclusively to the lower middle class homeowner.⁽³⁰⁾ Yet this late trend towards a physical segregation between middle and working class, lower middle, middle class and upper class was not very pronounced. In a second poverty survey in Northampton in 1925, Northampton was described as a "pleasant residential town".⁽³¹⁾ Most of the middle class remained untempted by the prospect of a suburban villa. The shoe factories were unpleasant places in which to work and contemporary experts believed that the leather dust filling the factory air was responsible for the high rate of T.B. in the town.⁽³²⁾ But the

- 28. D M Brooks, Technical Education and Apprenticeships, Part XV, sec 2, p11
- 29. M Harrison, A History of Weston Favell Parish (Northampton 1984), pp15-20 and Northampton Independent, 24th May 1940
- 30. An analysis of the rateable values of an estate of 1122 dwellings constructed during the 1880's shows that 840 (75%) had RV's of £13 or below. In a smaller estate of 523 dwellings constructed from 1900 to 1923 only 32% were in this category. (Source as in tables 1 and 2)
- 31. A L Bowley, Has Poverty Diminished? (1925), p64
- 32. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p364

industry was not a great source of environmental pollution. Its electrically driven machinery did not produce the palls of industrial smoke which characterised many other manufacturing towns. The topography of the area and the pattern of housing expansion had also contributed to preserving its attractions. The old town centre was bordered by a 'green lung',⁽³³⁾ consisting of the River Nene flood plain and most of the town's expansion had been on its East side. Cliftonville, a middle class enclave almost in the town centre, remained a very popular place of residence. William Barratt, one of the town's foremost shoe manufacturers, remained resident on this estate throughout the interwar years.⁽³⁴⁾ Two of the towns most working class districts, St James and Far Cotton, were in effect urban villages. They lay to the south of the River, separated from the rest of the town and surrounded on three sides by fields. The villages of Dallington and Duston, by the 1920's middle class suburbs of Northampton in all but name, were within walking distance of the St James factories and the railway freight depot in Far Cotton.⁽³⁵⁾ On the north east of the town centre nineteenth and early twentieth century expansion had led to a mixed pattern of residential and factory development. In its growth the town had taken in the old Northampton Racecourse, the country estates of the Wantage family and the shoe manufacturer Sir Henry Randall. With the exception of Sir Henry's estate, which was developed for housing in the 1900's,⁽³⁶⁾ the other parks were taken over by the municipality and kept as open space. These areas too remained very attractive to middle class families. In 1925 there were still only three Northampton wards which could be described as exclusively working class. In four wards middle class families were over

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- 33. T H Mawson & Sons, Proposals for the Development and Reconstruction of Northampton (Northampton 1925), p35
 - 34. Northampton Independent, 15th December 1939
 - 35. T H Mawson & Sons, Proposals for Development, p35
 - 36. B A Bailey, Monks Park, the Story of a Town Property in Northampton Past and Present, Vol IV, no 5, 1981-1982, p293

represented including South Ward in the town centre. In the other five wards representation of middle class to working class inhabitants was approximately comparable with their proportions in the population as a whole. (table 2)

The lack of extreme physical segregation of the classes in the Northampton population was complemented by the increase in the integration of local business interests and a tendency for manufacturers to maintain the close personal relationships with operatives that had been common in earlier years. The new engineering firms attracted investment from shoe manufacturers enjoying a greater level of disposable capital than they had ever known. In their turn printers bought shares in the new public companies in shoe manufacturing and retailing.⁽³⁷⁾ Industrialists in all the manufacturing industries became more involved in the town's infrastructure. They appeared as directors on the boards of the Northampton Electric Light Company and the Gas Company. Some invested in the expanding area of leisure and entertainment. William Barratt became a director of the Franklins Pleasure Gardens and other manufacturers took out large shareholdings⁽³⁸⁾ in the new Exchange Cinema Company.

Boot and shoe manufacturers had cemented relationships between their firms in 1891 with the founding of the national federation of shoe employers organisation.⁽³⁹⁾ The disruption in industrial relations which followed the Northampton lockout in 1887 and a national lockout in 1895 actually paved the way for a more peaceful relationship with labour. The arbitration procedures established in 1887 removed the major manifestation of conflict from the factory floor.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Wage negotiations were now carried on in halls and board

- 37. Northampton Reference Library Local Collection on John Dickens & Co Ltd
- 38. Northampton Independent, 9th April 1921, 19th July 1924 and 11th May 1934
also Mercury and Herald, 21st October 1921
- 39. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp129-131
- 40. J H Porter, The Northampton Boot and Shoe Arbitration Board before 1914
in NP&P, Vol IV, no 3, 1978, pp149-154 and J H Porter, The Northampton
Arbitration Board and the Shoe Industry Dispute of 1887 in NP&P, Vol
VI, no 2, 1979, pp93-99

rooms between manufacturers and trade union officials. In the larger scale shoe firms, like Manfield and Sons, the owner and his family were removed from daily contact with the workforce. The problems of workplace discipline were dealt with by managers and foremen and Sir Philip Manfield appeared only to celebrate anniversaries or the success of the factory choir in town competitions.⁽⁴¹⁾ At Sears (Truform) Ltd in the early 1900's, the illusion continued that its constituent factories were still under the control of their previous sole proprietors. For example, Frank Panther whose factory had been absorbed by the Truform group, continued as the manager of his factory.⁽⁴²⁾ Amongst the middle range of shoe firms as in the much smaller firms, direct family involvement remained the rule. Until well after the first World War the sons and nephews of the owner started working life on the factory floor and were expected to develop practical skills in the industry.⁽⁴³⁾ Personal paternalism together with well organised industrial bargaining accompanied the transition to factory based production.

However, the transition from outworking to factory operations was not without tension. The 1895 Lockout resulted from anti-arbitration feeling in NUBSO. For workers who had been used to deciding their own hours of work and pace of production, factory discipline was often an irritation. The unofficial walkouts and stoppages which provoked the manufacturers to lock out their operatives in 1895 were most widespread in London, but in Northampton too there were incidents of this kind.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Several trade union officials, members on local arbitration boards resigned in frustration at the unwillingness of operatives to accept the workings of the process. The 'no

41. E W Burnham, A Century of Shoemaking, pp180- 15 and 187

42. Northampton Independent, 2nd June 1944

43. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p445

44. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p207

'strike' agreement which the NUBSO (previously NUR F) had concluded with the employers in order to end the damaging dispute did not prevent unofficial militancy. As some Northampton manufacturers found out when they attempted to enforce new conditions on their operatives in the wake of the lockout, paper agreements did not stop men from walking out of the factory. Years of depression in the industry had more effect in halting such demonstrations and between 1897 and 1910 it did appear as though the 'no strike' agreement and arbitration structures were providing a real answer to industrial conflict. But the rising tide of demand in the shoe industry after 1910 promoted conditions in which Northampton was especially prone to renewed tension. Unlike their contemporaries in other centres of the industry NBSMA had found it impossible to persuade trade union officials or operatives to accept piecework. As trade improved they were forced to resort to foremen 'driving' in order to increase the pace of production. Between 1912-1913 there was an "epidemic" of unofficial strikes in Northampton shoe factories as both male and female workers protested against the "unfairness" of a particular supervisor or the fact that an individual operative was "earning too much money" from incentive schemes which had not been negotiated with the union.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Despite the urging of the shoe trade newspapers the manufacturers affected proved most unwilling to "stand by their foremen".⁽⁴⁶⁾ They quickly conceded both in terms of the immediate causes of disputes and in general policy. The NBSMA was instrumental in setting up a managers and foremens association and they openly admitted that they were intent on educating their supervisors in more diplomatic methods of increasing productive effort.⁽⁴⁷⁾ It was only in

45. K Brooker, *The Northamptonshire Shoemakers Reaction to Industrialisation*, p1⁹

46. The British Shoe Trades Journal, 4th October 1912 and 18th October 1912

47. The British Shoe Trades Journal, 1st November 1912 and 10th October 1919

1917, under threat from the DORA regulations which governed wartime industry, that trade union officials in Northampton balloted the membership on the issue of piecework.⁽⁴⁸⁾ In the context of the availability of wartime bonuses and their union officers changed stance on the subject a majority voted for its introduction.

The militancy of Northampton shoe operatives and the conservative and traditionalist impulses on which it was based has to be placed in the framework of rising living standards. The response of their employers was also strongly affected by this factor. Whereas in the 1840's and 1850's there was widespread poverty in Northampton, by 1913 wages and conditions were much improved. The poverty survey that year found that only 18% of their sample of manual worker families in Northampton had incomes less than 10/- above subsistence. By comparison in Warrington, 50% of the sample fell into this category. Primary poverty in Northampton was at the lowest level observed in any of the five towns in the survey.⁽⁴⁹⁾ In part this was due to the way the composition of the working class population had changed. The industrial reorganisation that had taken place in the 1890's and 1900's had stemmed the flow of immigration into the town. Without the insistent demand of the shoe industry for more and more labour there was little incentive for young agricultural workers to come into Northampton. The new machinery in shoemaking needed dexterous handling to fulfil its potential and the requirement of local industry was for semi-skilled and skilled labour. Printing and engineering of the type common in Northampton also involved a high level of skill. Consequently, most employers were engaged in some sort

48. The Shoe and Leather News, 14th September 1944

49. A L Bowley, Livelihood and Poverty, p83. Only 8% of the Northampton sample had an income below subsistence

of training commitment and had a tendency to recruit new operatives either through the local chapel or the families of existing workers. This not only extended the pattern of paternalistic practices but had a direct impact on family income. As the poverty survey noted, 44% of the Northampton sample had no non-earning children.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The age profile of the sample was older than in the other towns surveyed, where industry was still recruiting young labour from outside the urban area.

Wages, family size and the availability of industrial work for women were also important factors in making Northampton "a town of moderately well off working class families".⁽⁵¹⁾ Trade unionism had lifted shoemakers out of extreme poverty in the 1880's. Whereas in the mid-nineteenth century it had taken the wages of a whole family to survive, by 1911 the proportion of married women in full time work in Northampton had declined to around the national average.⁽⁵²⁾ Yet tradition and the continued availability of industrial work for women had produced a similar pattern of child bearing to that in the cotton industry. Women did not leave their employment until after their 25th birthday and then generally to raise a two-child family.⁽⁵³⁾ Like the married women in Elizabeth Roberts northern industrial towns,⁽⁵⁴⁾ Northampton wives often continued in full time work until after the birth of their first child and later used their factory skills in part time jobs. Homework was common as an adjunct to the small factory based dress making industry in the town and in the production of leather garments for motorvehicle and motorcycle wear. Sub-contracting closing rooms were prepared to engage women at hours to suit their family commitments.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Thus during the years in

50. A L Bowley, *Livelihood and Poverty*, p62

51. A L Bowley, *Livelihood and Poverty*, p87

52. Census Report 1911

53. Census Reports, 1911, 1921, 1931

54. E Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p136

55. Oral testimony of Mrs E Bridle and Mrs M Gillett

the family life cycle at which working class poverty was most likely, when the children were young, many families still had more than one wage coming into the house.

The image of Northampton as a pleasant residential town in which the majority of families were respectable and relatively prosperous encouraged employers to continue to see their workforce as sharing their own preoccupations. The lack of residential segregation and the persistent myth of high levels of working class homeownership in Northampton were also conducive to a belief that although shoemakers had ceased to be hand craftsmen, they retained an individualist and independent spirit.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The arrival of trade unionism and an experience of factory work may have convinced some workers that they had a separate class interested to that of their masters and the boom in demand in the shoe industry persisting until after the first World War, gave them confidence and high expectations.⁽⁵⁷⁾ But the religious and political culture of Northampton also gave employers and operatives a common heritage and view of the world.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Like its economic and social structure Northampton's religious and political culture suggested homogeneity. Northampton has been described as one of those towns which resisted the decline of liberalism and the emergence of class based politics.⁽⁵⁸⁾ According to Pelling the Liberals' success in controlling Northampton in the 1900's was partly the result of its non-conformist

56. H Barty King, Expanding Northampton (1985), p14 - quotes a 1920's advertisement produced by the Northampton Borough Council: "Northampton has long been known as the town where more working men own their own homes than is the case anywhere else in England (its workers have) more than the usual industrial intelligence and adaptability (they are) well read and informed".

57. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp413-414

58. H Pelling, The Social Geography of British Elections, pp110-115

traditions. Religious dissent had certainly played an important role in its early history. With the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, the County gentry had been the major beneficiaries of the land released. Northamptonshire squires had thus been very willing to encourage and patronise protestant views amongst their tenants and clergy. For example, Robert Browne, the founder of Congregationalism, had been a vicar in the Northamptonshire parish of Oundle. The parliamentary cause had received strong support in the County. But the restoration of the monarchy and the Act of Uniformity in 1662 had led to a wholesale retreat from both religious and political dissent among the leaders of County society. The prevalence of Tory Anglicanism amongst landowners, actually enhanced Northampton's non-conformist leanings. Disbarred from the professions, many Congregationalists set up in trade in the County town. Clergymen with dissenting opinions found it easier to find parishes in Northampton than in those patronised by the gentry. By the eighteenth century, when the non-conformist interest was becoming more assertive, Northampton had a long established tradition of support for religious freedom. Its ministers, Baptist and Congregationalist, were to the forefront in the *national agitation* for an end to state discrimination against non-Anglicans.⁽⁵⁹⁾

Amongst the tradesmen, merchants and shopkeepers of preindustrial Northampton, there was a well developed strand of association between religious and political radicalism. In the early nineteenth century, when the town began to attract mass production orders for boots it was these men who became the first agents for the London merchants. The small masters and merchants in Northampton industry were therefore also key figures in the town's chapels.⁽⁶⁰⁾

59. R L Greenall, *A History of Northamptonshire*, pp76-77

60. J Foster, *Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution*, p130

The workpeople recruited from the surrounding countryside shared in the general national reaction to urbanisation. According to the religious census of 1851 only 20% of Northampton's adult population attended any denomination of church or chapel.⁽⁶¹⁾ But of those who did worship, half were non conformists.⁽⁶²⁾ There was no cult or sect competition for the allegiance of working class chapel goers, Baptist and Congregational chapels attracted masters and men alike. As Foster has shown, shoe outworkers in Northampton had a strong tendency to follow their employers in religious affiliation.⁽⁶³⁾ A sense of resentment against their erstwhile masters, Northamptonshire's Tory squires, combined with a recognition of the benefits of social intercourse with the town elite encouraged shared religious experience.

In the first half of the nineteenth century religion and politics went hand in hand. The passing of the 1832 Reform Act and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 gave Whig-Liberal non conformists political power. The Northampton Parliamentary Constituency elected two MPs. Until 1832 both seats had been under the patronage of the Spencers. This aristocratic Whig family, somewhat isolated in the County context, were easily persuaded to share the constituency with a nominee of the non conformist manufacturers. The Tory professionals and brewers hold on the closed Corporation of Northampton was broken in the first election in 1835.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Thereafter, Liberal tradesmen and small masters held a majority on the Borough Council. But despite its pact with the Whigs Northampton Liberalism had a very radical flavour. The uncertain status of outworkers and small masters in Northampton gave Chartism

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- 61. J Foster, Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution, p128
 - 62. J Foster, Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution, p128
 - 63. J Foster, Class Struggle and Industrial Revolution, p130
 - 64. R L Greenall, A History of Northamptonshire, p114

in the town a leadership drawn from amongst a radical band of shopkeepers and merchants. The movement was motivated not by the grievances of industrial workers but by a passion for intellectual experimentation. Chartism was popular amongst the same section of the middle class which formed branches of the Owenite Community of Rational Religionists, the Christian Evidence Society, and Holyoake's Theological Utilitarians in Northampton between 1830 and 1850.⁽⁶⁵⁾ This group was also responsible for the first short lived experiments in co-operative and building societies in these years. By 1857 the radicals had such influence within the NLA as to impose their own choice of parliamentary candidate. Charles Gilpin, a radical Liberal became one of Northampton's two Liberal MPs. One of the most outspoken leaders of local radicalism was given a free run by the Liberals, in the municipal elections, even though he refused the Liberal whip.⁽⁶⁶⁾ But as Liberalism nationally moved toward an alliance with the radicals, there was an opposite movement in Northampton.

In 1867 when the Reform League in Britain merged with the Gladstonian Liberal Party the Northampton radicals invited Charles Bradlaugh to stand as an independent candidate in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. In 1874 he succeeded in attracting sufficient Liberal radical support to deprive Lord Henley, Earl Spencer's protege, of his seat. The defeat was sufficient to convince the Whig County interest that they had no further part to play in Northampton politics.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Northampton Liberalism was seen as uncompromisingly radical. However, although Bradlaugh's intervention had given one of Northampton's parliamentary seats to a Tory, the NLA was most

65. E Royle, Charles Bradlaugh Freethought and Northampton, p143

66. E Royle, Charles Bradlaugh Freethought and Northampton, p144

67. J Howarth, Politics and Society in late Victorian Northamptonshire in NP&P, Vol IV, no 5, 1970-1971, p269

unwilling to concede to radical demands for Bradlaugh to stand as a Liberal candidate. Bradlaugh's personal reputation as an atheist and supporter of birth control were a major deterrent to fusion. In 1880, after Gilpin's death, the NLA invited Henry Labouchere to stand for one of the Northampton seats. Though he later became known as the "Christian MP for Northampton",⁽⁶⁸⁾ Labouchere was himself a well known radical. It was only at his insistence that the NLA finally accepted Bradlaugh as their second candidate. The concession was made reluctantly and pragmatically in recognition that the division of Liberal and radical forces threatened another defeat.

For some of the leading members of the Liberal party, Bradlaugh's independent campaigns had seemed to raise the spectre of working class agitation. The national press had made much of Bradlaugh's appeal to atheistic shoemakers and there had, indeed, been riots and demonstrations in support of Bradlaugh. But despite the avowed intention of local building societies to enfranchise working men by giving them householder status, the vast majority of voters were actually lower middle class.⁽⁶⁹⁾ It was only with the support of the Liberal party and the respectable, chapel-going class which it represented that Bradlaugh could hope to succeed. Parliament's refusal to accept that the atheist Bradlaugh was competent to take the parliamentary oath led both to renewed fears about working class unrest and at the same time to a species of social unity. In the by-elections which followed from the constitutional impasse at Westminster, the slogan of the NLA became "Northampton's Right".⁽⁷⁰⁾ The right of Northamptonians to select the MP of their choice, whatever his religious affiliations, struck a chord with a middle class schooled in non

68. E Royle, Charles Bradlaugh Freethought and Northampton, p148

69. E Royle, Charles Bradlaugh Freethought and Northampton, p143

70. E Royle, Charles Bradlaugh Freethought and Northampton, p149

conformist battles with the state. Demonstrations by working class supporters of Bradlaugh were no longer seen as a threat to social harmony but rather as an expression of it.

When Bradlaugh was finally allowed to take his seat in 1886, it appeared as though Liberalism had become the unchallenged political philosophy of Northamptonians of all classes. On his death in the 1890's he was succeeded by Sir Philip Manfield and for the first time Northampton's manufacturers were in obvious and personal control of the town's politics. Yet in reality the radical progressivism which was becoming influential in the Liberal party's national philosophy was beginning to divide the town's industrialists. Conservatism, which had been reliant on the sponsorship of County squires and a few Northampton brewers, had started to recruit a more active and public support amongst shoe manufacturers. Richard Turner, one of the Conservative's parliamentary candidates in 1886, was a shoe manufacturer. Dismissed by Earl Spencer as a mere "cats paw"⁽⁷¹⁾ and social climber, Turner was one of the band of Anglican and Tory manufacturers who had always existed. They had previously remained quiet. The candidacy of Bradlaugh, the greater access of the working class to the vote and the simultaneous rise of trade unionism in Northampton, had begun to provoke a reaction amongst some manufacturers. The issues of home rule for Ireland and the Boer war provided further support for the Conservatives from amongst imperialist and unionist manufacturers.⁽⁷²⁾ In 1900 Labouchere's reputation as a 'Home Rule' advocate and as an opponent of the Boer war was underscored by the Liberal's choice of another candidate, Dr John Greenwood Shipman,⁽⁷³⁾ also a radical

71. P Gordon edit., The Red Earl: The Papers of the fifth Earl Spencer 1835-1910, Vol II (Northampton 1986), p125

72. Northampton Independent, 17th December 1937

73. E Gastell, Northamptonshire Leaders, Vol II (privately published 1909 - without page numbers)

and proponent of Irish independence.

Underlying the political disagreements between Northampton industrialists were issues of a more local character. Sir Philip Manfield's brief tenure of the parliamentary seat was ended in 1895 when, with his agreement, the NLA sought to cement the good relationships which they had built up with the national officers of NUBSO by inviting William Inskip, its General Secretary, to become one of their candidates.⁽⁷⁴⁾ The lockouts of 1886 and 1895 had an important political dimension. After 1886 Northampton became a stronghold of NUBSO. But the dispute had also been fertile ground for recruitment to the newly formed branch of the Northampton SDF.⁽⁷⁵⁾ By the 1890's a small group of socialist activists were taking the lead in the antiarbitrationist agitation within the union. In seeking to secure Inskip as a Liberal candidate progressive industrialists were hoping to strengthen the official leadership of NUBSO against these forces and at the same time prevent a loss of working class votes to the socialists. The Northampton SDF had made it clear that it intended to stand candidates in 1895. In the event Inskip was deterred from accepting the offer of the Northampton seat by the growing tide of opinion in the union in favour of an independent labour challenge in parliament. Instead of Inskip, the NLA had to make do with Harford of the Railway Servants Union as their 'labour' man. Though the Northampton SDF came a poor third in the election, the result convinced the majority of Liberal activists of the need to seek unity just as they had done when Bradlaugh's independent campaigns had divided the Liberal-radical vote. The election of 1895 left the town with one Liberal and one Conservative MP. The constituency had ceased to be

74. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, p21

75. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, p18

under complete Liberal control for the first time since 1875. As Pelling has pointed out it was not principally the loss of votes to the SDF which had brought about this result.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Harford had been defeated by a combination of defections to the right and the left. An independent Liberal standing in protest at Harford's support for legislation on working hours had also attracted middle class voters away from their traditional party. But for the majority of Northampton's Liberal activists progressivism and the New Liberalism held greater potential for success and was more philosophically acceptable than a drift toward conservatism within the party. Despite the rifts which had begun to emerge and which might have suggested a need to consolidate middle class support around less radical policies, they continued to press on.

As we have already noted their candidates in 1900 were drawn from the extreme left of the party. In 1906 the same candidates were put forward. In 1910 the NLA selected Charles McCurdy and H B Lees-Smith. Both were men with a reputation for radicalism and a desire to stress Liberalism's appeal to the working class.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Their selection was only one sign of the NLA's determination to unite left and radical forces. Before deciding upon these candidates the party had tried first to persuade the national LRC to stand a candidate with Liberal support. After that proposition was rejected the NLA had turned to the Northampton branch of the SDF and offered to give up one seat to them. In line with their national policy the Northampton SDF refused to consider the Liberal's suggestion.⁽⁷⁸⁾

In a period when many local Liberal parties were showing signs of reactionary

76. H Pelling, *The Social Geography of British Elections*, p114

77. ----- *Labour Who's Who* (1924), p104

78. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, p23

feeling the NLA's unusual behaviour was prompted by local factors. The party was coming under the leadership of men who had only recently risen from sub-contractor to manufacturer status. Activists like William Arnold,⁽⁷⁹⁾ the Lewis brothers⁽⁸⁰⁾ and James Crockett⁽⁸¹⁾ had an image of themselves comparable with that of the lower middle class of small masters who had formed the backbone of the Reform League in the 1860's. The non-conformist influence on the party and on its middle class supporters also enhanced a commitment to social harmony. The anxiety about working class atheism which had been inspired by Bradlaugh's role in the constituency in the 1870's and 1880's had given special meaning to the national evangelical revival which coincided with it. The Methodist sects had taken root in Northampton for the first time during those years. But rather than prompting a division of working class and middle class religious affiliation, the revival had laid the basis for stronger social bonds between tradesmen, manufacturers and the poor. Congregationalist and Baptists had been as enthusiastic in holding mass open-air meetings and in creating missions in poor working class districts as the Primitive Methodists.⁽⁸²⁾ Builders, tradesmen and industrialists joined the new sects, as well as discovering a new commitment to the older denominations. In Northampton middle class religionists did not retreat into respectable chapels away from contact with the working class. As the twentieth century opened, temperance became a crucial issue in Northampton. The coming of the factory had made manufacturers more conscious of the need for good

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79. J Saxton, The Recollections of William Arnold, (Northampton 1915), pp2 and 80. William Arnold was born in 1860, one of 14 children of a village shoemaker. William worked as a farm labourer and shoe operative before setting up his own business in 1884. By 1915 he was the owner of 3 firms employing 800 operatives in total.
80. Northampton Independent, 21st October 1922 and 23rd June 1944. Charles, Edward and Thomas Lewis went into partnership in the late 1880's. They were the sons of a craftsman shoemaker and had worked as outworkers prior to building their own factory.
81. Northampton Independent, 7th January 1922. Sir James Crockett was the son of a bankrupt. Before going into business in shoe manufacturing in 1878, Sir James worked as a printer, shop assistant and then a clicker.
82. R L Thompson, Mount Pleasant 1873-1953 (Northampton 1953), p vii

time keeping. 'Saint Monday',⁽⁸³⁾ the traditional day on which outworkers had celebrated their freedom from the rigours of a hard week's work could no longer be tolerated.

But it was the debate over the State's role in education which was critical in giving the NLA a renewed populist and reforming zeal. In 1898 the problem was dramatised in a confrontation which stimulated local political passion. The St James district had only one school, a Church of England establishment. With the growth of the district it had become extremely overcrowded. There was an increasing demand for a new school combined with growing agitation for a board school, under the control of elected representatives rather than the church. But the church authorities quickly proceeded with plans to extend the existing building. T D Lewis, a St James shoe manufacturer, together with the leaders of the non conformist chapels, led the agitation. A number of children were withdrawn from school and over 300 were given Bible instruction at a local cafe before going into school. Bible class children were punished for lateness. Others were sent home or punished for wearing medals made by the St James Education League. The local press was filled with accusations and counter accusations about the matter. Mr Lewis was said to be using his influence with his employees to encourage them to defy the school's authority. A Church of England clergyman was accused of refusing baptism to a dying child because her father supported non-sectarian education. What had been a parochial issue was to become a town wide argument. An explosive public inquiry was held under the auspices of Henry Labouchere, the Liberal MP and eventually a corrugated iron hut was erected which served as the St James Board School from 1900 until 1932.⁽⁸⁴⁾

83. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p22

84. F Roberts, A Board School for St James, Dip, Ed. thesis, University of Leicester, 1967, pp52-91

The resolution of the school issue in St James coincided with changes in local government boundaries in Northampton. Though it remained part of the Duston and Dallington School Board area, St James was incorporated into the Borough for all other purposes except poor law administration. Similarly on the north east the parish of Kingsthorpe was also brought into the town. The extension of the Borough boundary to the north east and south west led to a reorganisation of Ward areas^(fig 4) and representation. From having only four Wards in the nineteenth century the municipality now had twelve. Each Ward was able to elect three Councillors, with a third of all Councillors retiring each year to provide for an annual election.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Even before 1900 members of the SDF had begun to have a few successes in local elections. The branch had members on the central Northampton School Board and one of their number had been elected Borough Auditor.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Between 1900 and 1903 socialist Councillors were elected in Castle, Kingsthorpe and North Ward.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Three-cornered contests were proving to be a problem for Conservatives and Liberals alike. Kingsthorpe, which as a village had been a Tory stronghold, elected Northampton's first socialist Councillor in 1900. Castle Ward which had been Liberal in the 1900-1902 elections returned an SDF activist in 1903. In the same year North Ward also elected a socialist. The North Ward contests were particularly traumatic for the Liberals, for prior to 1900 it had been a Liberal stronghold.

Though there were still Liberal majorities on the Borough Council in the early 1900's, it was more and more clear as time went by that the

85. Northampton Herald, 31st October 1903

86. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p23

87. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p23

Conservatives were gaining ground in lower middle class areas. The St Michaels Ward based on one of the new building society estates, constructed in the 1890's, had become safely Conservative. By 1910 the Liberal party had not only withdrawn from the contest in some Wards, but was prepared to conclude an electoral pact with the socialists. Undeterred by their lack of success in doing so at the parliamentary elections, they offered to negotiate an agreement for the municipal elections. The Northampton SDF, finding itself under challenge from a newly formed ILP branch, proved amenable.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Although from 1910 onwards SDF and ILP candidates began to stand on a common slate the NLA maintained its links with the socialists. In return the SDF promised support for the election of Liberal Aldermen, though they insisted on the further concession of one Aldermanic place for the socialist group. Despite being tiny minority on the Borough Council the socialists held the whip hand, for by 1910 the only means of ensuring a progressive majority on the Council was by this sort of combination in the selection of Aldermen.⁽⁸⁹⁾

Thus in the context of Northampton's municipal structure the Liberal party retained its commitment to radical and progressive attitudes and found its allies on the left rather than the right. But in industry the conflict between socialists and local manufacturers was becoming more pronounced. The epidemic of unofficial strikes in local shoe factories was clearly led by the socialists. From being the minority of militants in a union led by moderates, Northampton SDF members had moved into positions of power in NUBSO's Northampton branches. In 1905 the secretaries of both local branches were socialists.⁽⁹⁰⁾ The paid officials of the union locally were also

88. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, p24

89. *Northampton Herald*, 4th November 1910

90. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, p24

active SDF members. One of them had been the SDF parliamentary candidate in 1895. James Gribble, the activist concerned was now also a member of the Borough Council.

Whilst Conservatives protested vigorously against this alliance between Liberals and socialists they gradually became habituated to accepting their involvement in the government of the town. Between 1914 and 1918 there were no further elections and the NBC became heavily involved in the war effort. Recruitment committees were set up, the local TB sanatoria were made over for the hospitalisation of injured soldiers and the council spearheaded the drive for war savings. In all these committees and efforts socialists were to the forefront. James Gribble initiated a joint union and manufacturer effort for the financial support of the Northampton General hospital. F O Roberts, secretary of the trades council and also of the Northampton ILP served on the soldiers recruiting committee.⁽⁹¹⁾ In 1917 Len Smith, NUBSO official and SDF activist, was finally persuaded to campaign for the introduction of piecework in Northampton shoe factories.

CONCLUSION

In many respects, Northampton's nineteenth and early twentieth century history was very different to that of Joyce's factory towns. Until the 1890's shoemaker employers had little opportunity to exercise the style of benevolent leadership he describes. Employers were not sufficiently wealthy or well established to make large scale gifts to the town or to their employees.

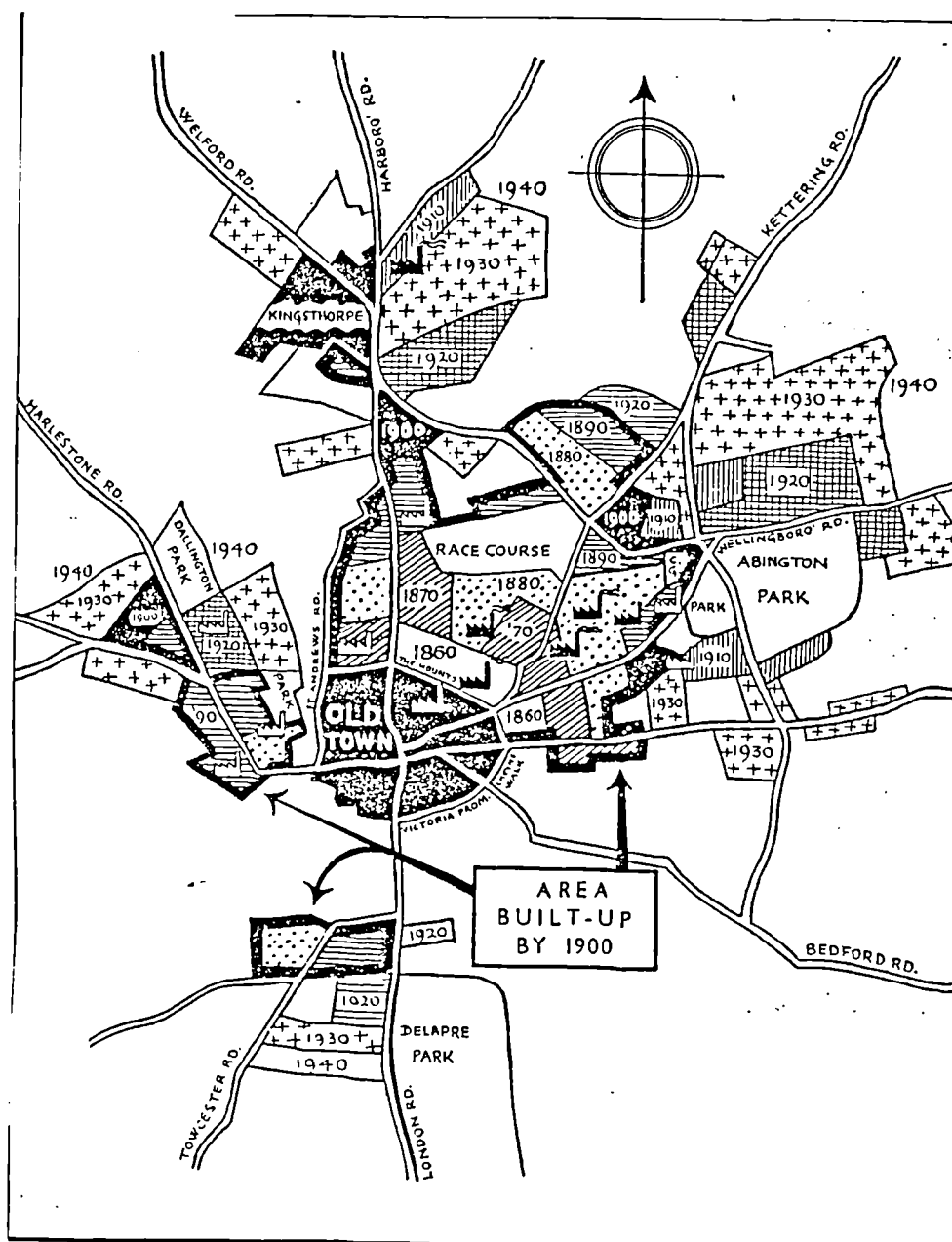
91. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p26

Many Northampton shoeworkers of the 1920's had started their working lives as outworkers. Yet the combination of a large lower middle class with non conformist leanings, the late mechanisation of local industry and the efforts of the town's building societies, had created an ethos very similar to that which Joyce calls the 'new paternalism'.⁽⁹²⁾ The town's industrialists saw themselves as leaders by merit and their fellow citizens as independent minded men who could be influenced but not coerced. There is only limited evidence of a breakdown in relationships between classes. The socialist presence from the 1880's and the outbreak of militancy in the shoe factories just before the war do not seem to have signalled a long term employer retreat from social leadership. On the contrary, there were signs of the industrialists' role being consolidated in a manner reminiscent of some of the cotton manufacturers of the 1860's.⁽⁹³⁾ There were more large scale factories and industrialists had started to diversify their financial interests and involve themselves in the urban infrastructure. The Northampton middle class and the working class entered the post Great War period with a heritage which provided ample evidence of the possibility of progress for all. It still seemed quite possible for the competing interests of different sections of the population to be reconciled under a largely middle class leadership.

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92. P Joyce, *Work Society and Politics*, p137. "In this ideological transformation the independent and self reliant workman was to be helped to help himself Aiming at work and hope, the worker was appealed to as a member of the whole community".
93. P Joyce, *Work Society and Politics*, p18

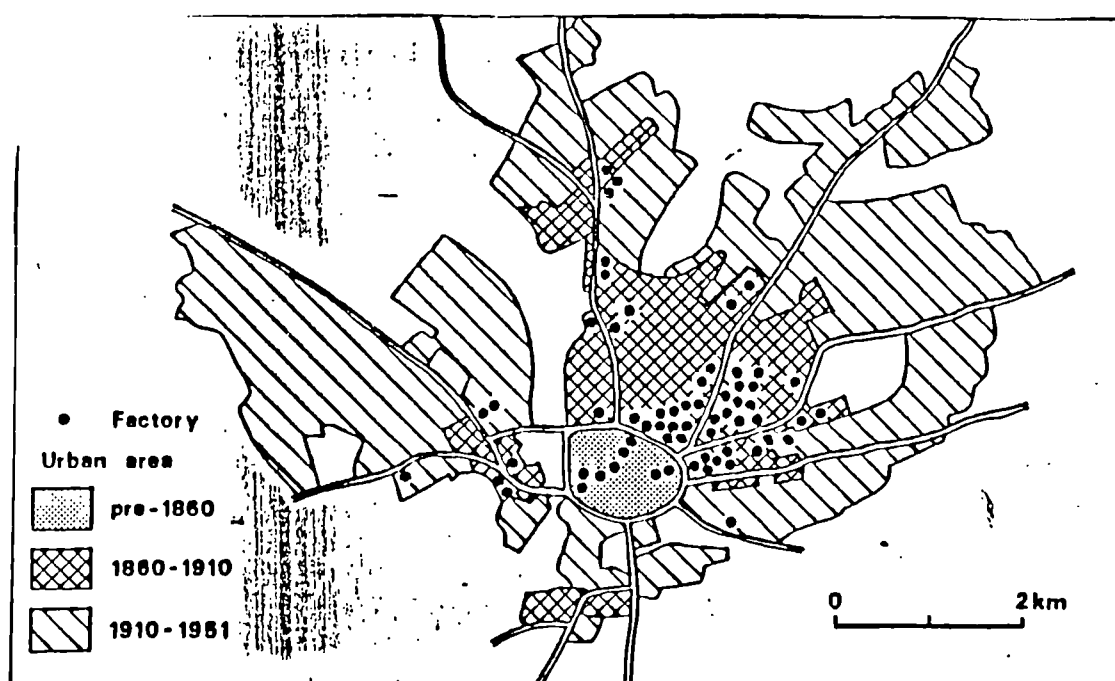
FIG. 1

THE EXPANSION OF NORTHAMPTON



SOURCE: P J Harris and P W Hartop, Northamptonshire - Its Land and People (1950)

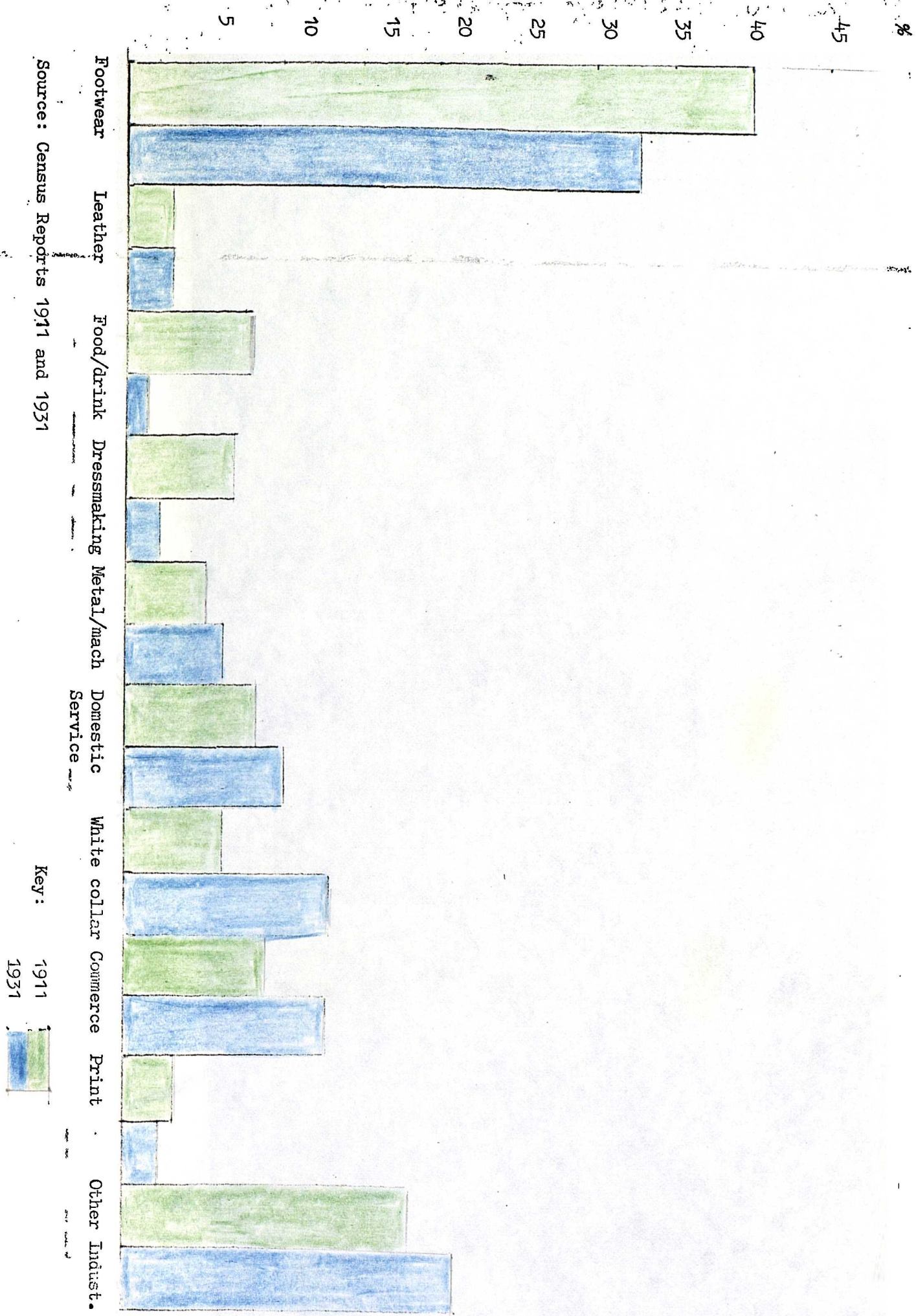
FIG. 2

LOCATION OF FOOTWEAR FACTORIES IN NORTHAMPTON

SOURCE: J M Roberts, The Diversification and Decentralisation of Industry in Northampton in East Midlands Geographer, Vol 7, no 51, 1979

Fig. 3

DISTRIBUTION OF OCCUPATIONS IN NORTHAMPTON 1911-1931

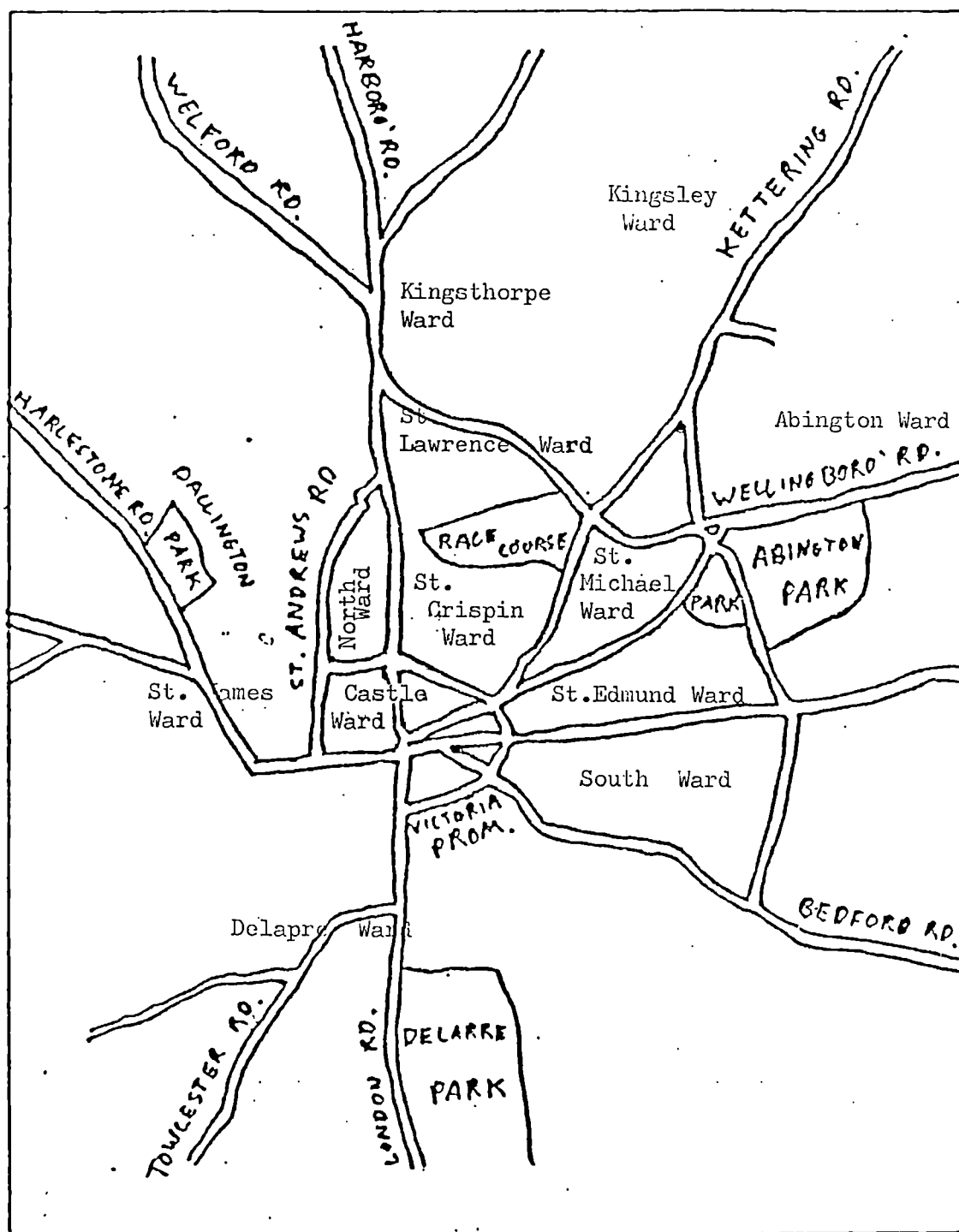


Source: Census Reports 1911 and 1931

Key: 1911 1931



Fig.4 Northampton Ward Structure 1900-1932



Source: Northamptonshire Reference Library maps and collected information.

TABLE 1

OWNER OCCUPANCY IN NORTHAMPTON IN 1925

Dwellings in Northampton	:	21202	
Owner occupied property	:	4613	(21.75%)
Dwellings by category	:	(a)	16587 (78.2%)
		(b)	3372 (15.9%)
		(c)	1241 (5.85%)
Owner occupancy in each category	:	(a)	2396 (14.44%)
		(b)	1581 (46.88%)
		(c)	636 (51.24%)

KEY: Category : (a) up to £13 Rateable value - working class dwelling

 (b) £14 - £26 Rateable value - lower middle class dwelling

 (c) £27+ Rateable value - middle class dwelling

SOURCE:

Based on an analysis of Northampton ratebooks for 1925 using categorisation employed by M Bowley. Housing and the State (1944) to identify housing by class.

TABLE 2CLASS COMPOSITION OF NORTHAMPTON WARDS 1925

Northampton as a whole: Cat (a) dwellings 78.2%
 Cat (b) dwellings 15.9%
 Cat (c) dwellings 5.85%

<u>WARD</u>	<u>DWELLINGS IN:-</u>		
	<u>CAT (a) %</u>	<u>CAT (b) %</u>	<u>CAT (c) %</u>
NORTH	92.8	5.92	1.09
DELAPRE	91.28	7.82	0.89
ST JAMES	<u>88.16</u> 10% above average concentration	9.63	2.2
CASTLE	83	8.9	7.7
KINGSTHORPE	82.51	14.49	2.98
ST CRISPIN	81.96	14.35	3.68
ST LAWRENCE	81.02	14.03	7.18
ST EDMUND	<u>80.3</u> 10% below average concentration	12.6	7.24
ABINGTON	68.56	23.68	7.74
SOUTH	68.27	18.06	13.66
ST MICHAEL	63.54	29.27	7.8
KINGSLEY	54.31	33.23	12.43

KEY: AS IN TABLE 1

SOURCE: AS IN TABLE 1

CHAPTER 2

TOWN PATRIOTISM 1918-1939

INTRODUCTION

The following chapter illustrates the way in which attitudes in industry and business in Northampton after the Great War provided the basis for a public culture of local patriotism. The role of the entrepreneur as the instigator of workplace benevolence and voluntary charity is shown as being vital to the ethos. But the problems faced by the town's social leaders could not be fully dealt with outside of the political sphere. While parliamentary politics offered little opportunity for the promotion of community feeling, local government still provided an outlet for businessmen convinced of the need to demonstrate their altruism.

ENTERPRISE AND SERVICE - A NEW IMAGE

As A E Marlow, the President of the Northampton Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Association explained in 1918:-

One of the results of the war is that we must look at industrial questions from a different standpoint. Although we shall be required to show initiative, enterprise and business acumen both employers and employees must regard their position from the point of view of the servants of the whole community.⁽¹⁾

1. Northampton Independent, 15th July 1922

Like a number of Northampton businessmen Marlow was an early convert to the ideas of industrial welfare and co-operation advocated by Sir Alfred Mond⁽²⁾ and the newly formed Industrial Welfare Society.⁽³⁾ Marlow believed that private enterprise was under threat from state intervention and nationalisation and even from working class revolution. The answer to these post war challenges lay in promoting an atmosphere of common interest between industrialists themselves and between employer and employee. Above all, he was convinced that it was necessary for entrepreneurs to demonstrate the importance of their industrial role to society.

The message preached by Mond and his local disciple Marlow, was a peculiarly appropriate one for Northampton industrialists. They were, as the previous chapter indicated, a well integrated group with a history of common interests. Most local businessmen were natives of Northampton and the majority still lived in the town. The dominance of the shoe industry together with the localised financing of subsidiary industries had created a pattern of associated business interests. The recent origin of some of the towns leading firms and the prominence of so many business founders in Northampton made the industrial community very conscious of the special role of the entrepreneur. Furthermore, many of the most important shoe and engineering enterprises retailed their products directly to the public. The creation of a company image; propaganda and advertising was already a well established part of business life. Industrial relations policies in the shoe industry had been based on conciliation and arbitration since the 1880's. Together with immediately pre-war experiences of industrial unrest these

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2. A J P Taylor, English History 1914-1945 (1975), p317. Sir Alfred Mond, the chairman of ICI and advocate of "combination and conciliation" in industry, gave his name to the type of business philosophy known as Mondism.
 3. E Sydney, The Industrial Society 1918-1968 (1968), p10 - describes the founding of the Industrial Welfare Society in 1918 by Sir Robert Hyde. The Duke of York became the organisation's President

policies provided a long term basis for a desire to promote harmony.

Mond's philosophy placed particular emphasis on the need for joint effort by industrialists. Northampton shoe manufacturers were faced with the prospect of a long period of damaging cut throat competition in the battle for markets. They were about to try to recapture lost export markets. Their foreign competitors had the advantage of modern technology, lower labour costs and, in some cases, tariff barriers⁽⁴⁾ erected to protect indigenous industry. Marketing and industrial research were seen as vital elements in the struggle to overcome these obstacles to British export potential. The NBSMA had already demonstrated its appreciation of the need for joint effort in 1916. Marlow had led the drive to form a Northampton Chamber of Commerce and the NBSMA provided its office and the majority of its funding until well into the 1930's.⁽⁵⁾ Immediately after the war the NBSMA set about founding a research body for the shoe industry. The project was started in 1919 with membership entirely from within the town, including tanners and leather merchants, as well as manufacturers. Within months it was adopted as a national project by the Federation.⁽⁶⁾

For the Northampton business community these early collaborative ventures were the prelude to a long term policy of marketing Northampton products and selling the town's image as forcefully as they advertised individual firms.⁽⁷⁾ The NCC became the focus for a drive to portray Northampton as the home of quality goods, technical excellence and scientific innovation. The needs of the shoe industry provided the momentum for the policy but it

4. Board of Trade Working Party Report: Boots and Shoes (1946), p34

5. The Shoe and Leather News, 11th July 1929

6. The Federation of Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Year Book, Vol 3 (1926), p180

7. The Shoe and Leather News: Northampton Supplement 7th April 1927

also appealed to other industrialists. Local engineers and printers found the new policy as attractive as the shoe industry itself. The NCC was the showcase for Northampton's manufactured goods. During the 1920's the chamber sponsored a variety of trade delegations overseas, including one to the USSR.⁽⁸⁾ In 1930 it hosted a Northampton Festival Trades Exhibition attracting visitors from all over the Midlands and South East of England.⁽⁹⁾

Advertising Northampton and its virtues was not simply an industrial imperative. Northampton tradesmen were equally convinced of the value of joint marketing efforts. The Chamber of Trade used the slogan 'buy Northampton for local prosperity',⁽¹⁰⁾ in a number of advertising campaigns in the 1920's. Shopkeepers were even more concerned than industrialists to project an image of Northampton conducive to its economic well being. Unlike the manufacturers they were totally dependant on the buoyancy of the local economy for their own success. The problems of the shoe industry directly affected their trade. High levels of unemployment and short time working⁽¹¹⁾ in the industry reduced the buying power of their customers and threatened shopkeepers with bankruptcy. Their views were shared by Northampton builders,⁽¹²⁾ who were similarly reliant on the town's prosperity for their survival. The Northampton 'New Industry' Committee⁽¹³⁾ set up by the Borough Council in 1919 was a direct response to middle class concern about such issues. The committee was set the task of encouraging new industries into the town and broadening its economic base. It was a cross-party undertaking, supported by all sides in a Council with a high representation of tradesmen and builders.
(table 3)

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8. The Shoe and Leather News, 4th July 1929 and 18th July 1929
 9. Northampton Independent: Souvenir Edition 31st May 1930 and the Illustrated Programme of Northampton Festival Trades Exhibition 26th-31st May 1930 (Northampton 1930)
 10. Northampton Independent, 2nd and 30th November 1925, 16th November 1929, 3rd October 1931
 11. Board of Trade Working Party Report: Boots and Shoes, p68 - calculates that short time working was prevalent in the industry throughout the 1920's and 1930's. During 1938 short time was worked by 20% of operatives in March and 42% in December
 12. Northampton Independent 19th February 1921
 13. Northampton Municipal Year Book for 1919 (Northampton 1919)

These activities complimented and enhanced those of the NCC. The New Industry Committee paid for advertisements in the national press and even made its own film about the town,⁽¹⁴⁾ stressing Northampton's advantages for industry. The key themes of the Committee's official image of Northampton were very similar to those produced by the chamber. The town was described as "progressive", its workers were "educated", "skilled" and "industrious".⁽¹⁵⁾ Though the availability of cheap land for development also played some part in such advertising, the emphasis was always on Northampton as a place where innovation and co-operation were the rule.

The NCC and the New Industry Committee were, of course, principally interested in offering a marketing image of Northampton outside the town. However, co-operation for the common financial interests of the middle class was only one aspect of businessmen's thinking during the interwar years. Loyalty to Northampton and a belief in the bonds of citizenship offered local businessmen comfort and self justification. The Northampton image was no mere cynical exploitation of town patriotism for commercial purposes. It expressed a deeply held and sincere conviction. As one Northampton builder said in 1933, "I believe in Northampton... there is no better place than Northampton... if you can find a better 'ole get into it!"⁽¹⁶⁾ Industrialists and tradesmen shared a philosophy rooted in pre-war radicalism and non-conformism but now given great salience by the progressive corporatist strand in national business thinking. They were convinced that they were outstanding individuals possessed of "initiative, enterprise and business acumen", but that they were also "servants of the whole community".⁽¹⁷⁾

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- 14. Northampton Borough Council Public Relations Department have recently reproduced this film on video
 - 15. Northampton Independent 5th October 1934 and 18th October 1935
 - 16. Chronicle and Echo 11th February 1933
 - 17. Northampton Independent 15th July 1922 (as in footnote 1)

Showing an interest in the welfare of the operatives enabled industrialists to demonstrate their claims to benevolence and underlined the commitment to progress and efficiency. In other words it re-enforced the image of the entrepreneur. It is notable that firms as diverse as Sears (Truform) Ltd and Grose Ltd, a manufacturer and retailer of luxury automobiles, advertised their wares by describing the "modern working conditions"⁽¹⁸⁾ of their workforce and the "consideration shown to employees".⁽¹⁹⁾ Just as Northampton businessmen had responded willingly to the call for co-operation between themselves, they also readily took note of Mond's ideas for co-partnership. But their activities were heavily conditioned by their belief in the special role of the entrepreneur in industry. They envisaged no sacrifice of employer prerogatives and only limited concessions to the democratic spirit of the age. One major public company in shoemaking, Sears (Truform) Ltd, offered shares in the firm to employees but only to managers.⁽²⁰⁾ Manfield and Sons Ltd, the most important private shoe firm, brought its managers on to the Company Board but continued to restrict shareholding to members of the Manfield family.⁽²¹⁾ A number of social and provident funds were set up. These usually involved the employer in making a lump sum contribution to form the basis of an investment portfolio, the profits of which were available for pensions, insurance and sickness benefits for the operatives. In one shoe firm the investment panel for the fund included workers' representatives.⁽²²⁾ But Manfield and Sons was the only firm to set up a works council which controlled the fund and used it for social activities as well as benefits.⁽²³⁾ The most widespread form of reaction to the new

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- 18. The Story of Truform: A Souvenir Booklet (Northampton 1925) no page numbers
 - 19. Northampton Independent 24th March 1939
 - 20. Northampton Independent 4th February 1922
 - 21. E W Burnham, A Century of Shoemaking, pp180-185
 - 22. The Shoe Trades Journal 21st November 1919
 - 23. E W Burnham, A Century of Shoemaking, p263

ideas about giving workers "a stake in the enterprise"⁽²⁴⁾ was, however, simply an extension of earlier paternalistic activities. Amongst shoe firms and in printing and engineering there was fashion for sports and social clubs.⁽²⁵⁾ Some employers donated land or premises so that clubs could be set up.⁽²⁶⁾

Some managers as well as industrialists clearly regarded the family firm as the microcosm of social organisation and the conduct of social relations within the enterprise as the model for the functioning of the wider community. Two managers wrote accounts of their own lives during the period.⁽²⁷⁾ Both stressed the importance of the talented leader in industry and in society. Like an earlier biography⁽²⁸⁾ of a local manufacturer these autobiographies expressed a belief in service to the common interest. Given the tendency of Northampton business men to see themselves as servants of the community and at the same time as individuals of outstanding ability it is not surprising that they did not confine their acts of benevolence to the workplace. But their activities in the wider sphere of the Northampton community also served to re-enforce the image of Northampton which was the central theme of the commercial ethos. Business interest in cultural and charitable societies was not new. The late nineteenth century had seen the formation of organisations like the Good Samaritan Society,⁽²⁹⁾ to assist poor children and the Northamptonshire Natural History Society,⁽³⁰⁾ to encourage an interest in the

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24. The Shoe Trades Journal, 31st October 1919 and 28th November 1919
 25. Northampton Independent, 14th January 1922
 26. Northampton Reference Library Local Collection on John Dickens & Co Ltd and Clarke and Sherwell Ltd refer to premises provided in two printing firms, Northampton Independent, 24th May 1940 refers to sports grounds provided at Lotus Ltd and Northampton Gas Company at the instigation of F Bostock, the chairman of both companies (1918-1940)
 27. E W Burnham, A Century of Shoemaking and G Chapman, A Life Bound in Leather in Northampton Independent, 14th and 21st November 1931
 28. J Saxton, Recollections of William Arnold, pp72-77
 29. Northampton Daily Echo, 23rd October 1929 and Northampton Daily Chronicle 17th February 1930
 30. Journal of the Northamptonshire Natural History Society Vol XXIII (1926) no 188, p10 refers to the founding of the society in 1876

sciences. Freemasonry had also been popular for a number of years.⁽³¹⁾ But in the years after World War I there was an upsurge of both charitable and cultural work. New groups were formed, like the Northampton Rotary Club in 1921.⁽³²⁾ Manufacturers continued to be amongst the prominent supporters of the Good Samaritan Society⁽³³⁾ but they also took a leading role in the Northampton Rotary Club's scheme to provide 'foster fathers' for boys who had lost their fathers during the war.⁽³⁴⁾ They provided help and guidance in finding apprenticeships for such boys and took them on educational outings. Industrialists were key figures in the group which set about giving Northampton a high profile and innovative reputation in theatre. The Northampton Repertory Theatre Company was one of the earliest provincial attempts to replace the touring players with a resident company performing works by well known dramatists.⁽³⁵⁾ Its founding in 1927 exemplifies the type of voluntary social service in which Northampton businessmen were most heavily involved in the interwar years. A number of projects were based on a traditional pattern of charity to the poor, but they also tended to have an innovative dimension. In many cases they served to enhance manufacturer co-operation with the lower middle class, particularly the newer group of white collar workers. The Repertory Theatre, for example, quickly acquired the services of a 'Playgoers Association' led by teachers and clerks.⁽³⁶⁾ The Northampton Record Society for the collection of local historical documents and the Friends of Northampton Art Gallery⁽³⁷⁾ also attracted lower middle class interest. The most outstanding examples of business participation in voluntary town improvement were, however, the development of the Manfield Hospital for crippled children in 1925 and the founding of the Bethany Homestead in 1927.

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31. Certificate of Registration of the Northampton Masonic Club Company is dated 18th December 1888
 32. Northampton Independent, 1st February 1935
 33. Northampton Daily Echo, 30th October 1926 and 23rd October 1929
Northampton Daily Chronicle, 17th February 1930 and Chronicle and Echo, 1st November 1933, 31st October 1934, 18th December 1935
 34. Northampton Independent, 12th July 1924
 35. A Dyas, Adventures in Repertory (Northampton 1948), pp16-17 and 98
 36. A Dyas, Adventures in Repertory, pp18 and 23
 37. A Short Guide to Northampton Central Museum and Art Gallery (undated pamphlet without page numbers)

In 1924 James Manfield donated his family home to the Northampton General Hospital for use as a children's hospital.⁽³⁸⁾ In itself, this act was part of a pattern of manufacturer generosity to the town very notable during the 1918-1939 period. The Lewis Brothers, another family of shoe manufacturers, had donated several acres of ground for a park in 1922.⁽³⁹⁾ In 1934 William Barratt provided over £50,000 so that Northampton could have its first Maternity Hospital.⁽⁴⁰⁾ But the Manfield donation was the occasion for a novel demonstration of community feeling and participation. It is evidence of the way in which the Northampton commercial ethos had been translated into a public culture of town patriotism. The need for funds to equip the children's hospital led to an expansion of the traditional annual cycle parade into a three day event, in aid of the General Hospital. The town's charities, schools, musical societies and even motorcycle clubs were mobilised to present a 'pageant' of events from Northampton's early history. Over 1000 people took part in the tableaux and many more were engaged in several weeks of work on decorating floats and making costumes. As the Northampton Independent reported with some pride the event "united all creeds and politics"⁽⁴¹⁾ in support of the town.

Less than two years later the Northampton chapels became the focus for yet another celebration of the town's unity. The Baptist and Congregational Chapels started a fund for building an old people's home. The Bethany Homestead was to be a pioneering venture in the provision of care for the elderly. It was to include a number of cottages for the more independent old people grouped around a chapel, dining hall and institution providing nursing care for the sick and infirm.⁽⁴²⁾ The finances for building and running the

38. Northampton Mercury, 4th July 1924

39. Northampton Independent, 21st October 1922

40. Annual Report of the Northampton Medical Officer of Health for 1938

41. Northampton Independent, 13th June 1925

42. Rev Appleton, Fifty Years of Practical Christianity (Northampton 1977) the pamphlet has no page numbers

home were to be raised by public donation, principally from weekly collections in the town's chapels. The Baptist and Congregational chapel members were also recruited as volunteers to supplement a professional staff. Within a matter of months the land for the Homestead had been donated by a local builder and a number of manufacturers had given enough money to build all the cottages.⁽⁴³⁾ The local press reported with mounting excitement on the generous offers of help from the town's business community and the sterling work of collectors in the chapels.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Once the Homestead was opened, the visits of interested experts from all over the country confirmed the impression that Northampton was once again in the forefront of progressive social provision.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The Northampton Festival Trades Exhibition in 1930 brought together the commercial and community aspects of the Northampton image. The exhibition, organised by the NCC, was ostensibly designed to advertise Northampton wares on the home market. But its organisers were obviously keen to bring together the themes of industrial efficiency and service to the community which Northampton businessmen had espoused. The Duke of York, President of the Industrial Society, was invited to open the exhibition and to visit local factories.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The royal visit was merely one aspect of making the exhibition a community event. The commercial stands set out in one of Northampton's parks were surrounded by charity stalls and one of the major events of the week was the restaging of the Northampton pageant.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The cultural and artistic contribution to the affair was highlighted by the design

43. Oral testimony of Dennis Webb, whose brother Frank was the Homestead's Treasurer during the 1930's

44. Rev Appleton, *Fifty Years of Practical Christianity*

45. Northampton Independent, 23rd November 1956 in an article marking the death of one of the Homestead's founders

46. Northampton Independent, 12th April 1930 and 31st May 1930

47. The Illustrated Programme of the Northampton Festival Trades Exhibition 1930

of the stalls and posters advertising it. The Northampton Repertory Theatre's avant garde set designer was engaged to disguise the stalls as a medieval village and to produce a poster which complemented the historical emphasis of the whole affair.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The proceeds of the festival and exhibition were donated to Northampton charities.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Once again, both participants and spectators were encouraged to see Northampton as an entity uniting charity, industrial efficiency and creativity.

Town patriotism could be seen as being at its most pronounced amongst businessmen and most salient to them and to the lower middle class. Its most active proponents were industrialists and tradesmen. Voluntary groups and the chapels probably recruited most heavily from the status conscious lower middle class. But working class Northamptonians were not just spectators at events such as the Festival Trades Exhibition and the 1925 pageant. The paternalism practised in many Northampton firms provided ample opportunity for employers to speak directly to the workforce; to stress the importance of the role of the talented entrepreneur and the community of interest between employer and employee. Sports events,⁽⁵⁰⁾ works outings,⁽⁵¹⁾ anniversary dinners⁽⁵²⁾ and presentations to workers who had completed long years of service⁽⁵³⁾ were all forums for homilies on these subjects.

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- 48. Northampton Independent, 15th February 1930 and 10th May 1930
 - 49. The Shoe and Leather News, 12th December 1930 and Northampton Independent, 5th April 1930
 - 50. The Shoe and Leather News, 23rd June 1927, 30th June 1927, 18th August 1927, 22nd September 1927
 - 51. Northampton Independent, 19th July 1924 reports on the day out to the British Empire Exhibition enjoyed by the employees of the Northampton Gas Company. The Board of Directors paid the rail fares, refreshments and spending money for the men and their wives. Full wages were also paid for the day
 - 52. Northampton Independent, 14th October 1922 reports on the tea and entertainment provided at A P Hawtin's building firm when his two sons became partners in the enterprise. Northampton Independent, 15th November 1924 records an employees outing to W T Sears' country estate to celebrate his son's coming of age. The Shoe and Leather News, 1st December 1927 refers to the dinner and dance held for A E Marlow's son on his 21st birthday and that 700 employees and their families were present
 - 53. Northampton Independent, 11th June 1921 and 6th July 1934

Northampton's industrial employers commonly demonstrated their claim to special talent and belief in shared citizenship by presenting themselves as a self made men or as workers. The strong representation of business founders amongst the industrial community provided the foundation for a widespread mythology about the meritocratic rise of such men from the factory floor to the director's office. Two of the four principal shoe manufacturing firms were still under the control of their founders. William Barratt of Barratt Brothers Ltd and William and Jack Sears of Sears (Truform) Ltd could legitimately claim to have made a spectacular progress from very humble beginnings. William Barratt had been a shop assistant in one of Manfield's branch shops in the early 1900's. His father had owned a small shop retailing shoes, but Barratt's success was clearly his own.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The Sears Brothers had begun their business as outworking sub-contractors in a cramped backroom workshop.⁽⁵⁵⁾ But in many cases a progress from lower middle class to upper middle class was exaggerated in order to emphasise the businessman's enterprise and plebian sympathies. Sir Henry Randall, of the shoe firm H E Randall Ltd, was fond of making the joke that he had not "come to Northampton with a half crown" in his pocket, "I had nothing and no pocket".⁽⁵⁶⁾ In fact he was the son of a local draper and the nephew of a shoe manufacturer. Having served his apprenticeship in his uncle's factory he had gone into business at the age of twenty one with two wealthy, well established partners.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The engineer Bassett Lowke, had similarly been able to capitalise on the experience and connections built up by his father.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Yet he was always more likely to stress the physical labour he had endured as a boy in his father's foundry⁽⁵⁹⁾ than the financial backing he had received from a number of other

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- 54. K Brooker, Barratt Arthur William (1877-1939) in D J Jeremy, Dictionary of Business Biography Vol A-C (1984), pp184-186
 - 55. E W Burnham, A Century of Shoemaking, p62
 - 56. The Shoe Trades Journal, 12th December 1919
 - 57. The Shoe Trades Journal, 19th December 1919
 - 58. R Fuller, The Bassett Lowke Story (1984), pp10-11
 - 59. R Fuller, The Bassett Lowke Story, p292

businessmen.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Mrs Pigott, the third generation of the Manfield family to chair the company board, was a particular and outstanding example of the tendency to claim worker status even when it could not be justified by reference to founding a new business. In a company which had long since ceased to require the personal supervision of its owner, she still insisted that she carried out "daily executive duties" and even that she had a "production role" as a shoe designer. As the Industrial Society journal admiringly recorded she appeared on the factory floor "clad like all the other women and girls in a simple white overall".⁽⁶¹⁾

As the 1920's gave way to the 1930's the local press played an increasing part in the propagation of the Northampton ethos. Like most other provincial towns Northampton weekly and daily papers had started as organs of party political opinion. Its two major weeklies and two principal evening papers continued to report local events in line with such partisan concerns throughout the 1920's. But there was also one weekly journal, founded in 1908, which had an editorial policy ostentatious in its parochialism and lack of partisanship. The Northampton Independent proclaimed by its very title that it stood above the party political conflict and represented the Northampton interest. W H Holloway, its owner-editor had sold the paper to the owner of the Northampton Liberal group of newspapers in the early 1920's. Nonetheless first he and then his son, continued as the editors.⁽⁶²⁾ The Northampton Independent retained its image as a neutral arbiter and spokesman for the betterment of the town. It campaigned for new ventures like the Repertory theatre and advocated pride in Northampton in virtually every editorial. As one of three weeklies and two dailies the Northampton

60. R Fuller, *The Bassett Lowke Story*, p339

61. *Northampton Independent*, 5th October 1929, reproducing an article in the journal *Industrial Welfare and Personnel Management*

62. *Northampton Independent*, January 1972 Obituary to B Holloway, the newspapers editor 1928 to 1963

Independents' influence was relatively weak. From its tone and style it appears to have been aimed at a predominantly middle class readership. But in 1931 all of the town's newspapers were taken over by Provincial Newspapers Ltd.⁽⁶³⁾ The other two weekly papers were merged as the Mercury and Herald and the old dailies combined under the title Chronicle and Echo. A new editor was brought in from outside Northampton to manage the transformation of the paper into a popular tabloid.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The Northampton Independent was the only title left untouched under its original editor. Charged with the task of giving the new daily a popular non-partisan appeal, Cowper Barrons quickly adopted the same style as the Holloways. The Chronicle and Echo claimed to speak for Northampton and the newspapers editor became active in projecting and supporting Northampton charities. Reports of local news were orientated toward consensus. Men who could be identified as speaking for the common interest: Councillors, MPs, business leaders and public officials such as the Chief Constable and Medical Officer of Health, were quoted extensively.

THE COMMUNITY UNDER PRESSURE

The greater disposition of the press to support town patriotism came at a point when the ethos was probably undergoing its greatest test. The belief in progress and general optimism of the Northampton middle class was a double edged sword. It formed the basis of civic pride but engendered expectations difficult to fulfil in a period of economic depression. The objectives of the Chamber of Commerce and the New Industry Committee were never really fulfilled. Industrial diversification proceeded very slowly indeed and largely as a result of the expansion of indigenous firms not immigration.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The British Boot and

63. Chronicle and Echo: Golden Jubilee supplement, 2nd November 1981

64. Northampton Independent, 24th December 1958 reporting on the retirement of Mr Cowper Barrons, who had been editor of the Chronicle and Echo 1931 to 1958

65. H Barty King, Expanding Northampton, p13

Shoe industry failed to recapture its lost export position⁽⁶⁶⁾ and continued to struggle for markets. Federated firms such as those in Northampton found themselves increasingly in competition with manufacturers who had no trade union agreements to hamper them in cutting wages.⁽⁶⁷⁾ There were rumours of takeover bids. Northampton businessmen became vociferous in their denunciations of financiers, whose interest in the industry was seen as the trojan horse of foreign competition'. British banks had failed to back British shoe manufacturers in their attempts to re-enter the overseas market and by the late 1920's and early 1930's seemed to be backing foreign intervention in the native shoe industry.⁽⁶⁸⁾ According to William Barratt these moves concealed a plot by American shoe retailers to dump their excess manufacture on the British market. Industrialists who accepted such offers "threatened the livelihood of thousands of workpeople in a town like Northampton".⁽⁶⁹⁾

There was a latent jingoism and xenophobia in much of the propaganda for Northampton patriotism. It came to the surface and was expressed in almost hysterical terms in the 1931 to 1933 period. In late 1931 the Czechoslovakian shoe firm, Bata, began to indicate its intention to build a factory at Tilbury.⁽⁷⁰⁾ In practical terms the matter was of little concern to Northampton industrialists. Bata produced low grade women's footwear and was not in direct competition with the medium to high grade men's shoes for which Northampton was famous. But both NBSMA and the local branches of NUBSO joined enthusiastically in the joint Federation-NUBSO campaign to prevent this foreign firm from further penetrating the home market.⁽⁷¹⁾ Northampton shoe

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- 66. Board of Trade Working Party Report: Boots and Shoes, p34
 - 67. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp446 and 450
 - 68. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp442-443
 - 69. The Shoe and Leather News, 1st August 1929
 - 70. The Shoe and Leather News, 14th January 1932
 - 71. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p527

manufacturers were regarded as amongst the most vehement opponents of Bata. The shoe trade press made cautious comments supporting the company's non-union stance and suggesting that it might be a useful contribution to breaking NUBSO's stranglehold on the major British shoe firms. But they also acknowledged that Northampton shoe manufacturers were to the forefront in seeking government intervention to stop the factory being built.⁽⁷²⁾ Northampton's own newspapers fully reflected the town's unanimity on the subject. Banner headlines and extensive coverage were given to denunciations of Bata. Union delegations inspecting the Bata works at Zlin in Czechoslovakia were reported as finding sinister, anti-democratic tendencies in the organisation.⁽⁷³⁾ The conveyor belt system used by the firm and the wholesale dependance of the factory village on the company were described as producing men who were mere extensions of the machinery they used, incapable of independent thought.

The Bata campaign in Northampton underlined and enhanced a number of negative and defensive aspects of the town's public culture. The hostility which Northampton industrialists expressed toward foreign competitors and British financiers was fuelled by anxiety about their own failures. Lack of progress seemed to threaten the co-operation they had established between themselves and with their operatives. In 1933, when the Bata campaign had failed, there was clear evidence of the type of disintegration manufacturers most feared. A small group of Northampton shoe firms broke away from the local association and the FBSMA and proclaimed their intention to negotiate different terms and conditions for their employees.⁽⁷⁴⁾ The unilateralists came under intense pressure to withdraw from their wage-cutting strategy. Both NBSMA⁽⁷⁵⁾ and the local branches of NUBSO⁽⁷⁶⁾ were intent on forcing the ten dissident

72. The Shoe and Leather News, 14th January 1932

73. Northampton Independent, 10th October 1931, 12th December 1931,
5th December 1931

74. Chronicle and Echo, 14th February 1933

75. Chronicle and Echo, 24th January 1933 and 17th March 1933

76. NUBSO Monthly Reports March to May 1933

manufacturers back into the fold. But the conditions which had inspired the dispute intensified the conflict, even though unity was re-established for a short time.⁽⁷⁷⁾ The ten firms were persuaded to go to arbitration,⁽⁷⁸⁾ but within two years four of the firms were bankrupt.⁽⁷⁹⁾ For smaller shoe manufacturing businesses all over Britain, the FBSMA policy of structured, national wage negotiations was a handicap to its smaller members in the competition for orders. The larger, better financed firms could hold their place in the market by improving technology and using their own retail outlets but wage cutting appealed to smaller firms. In 1934, influenced by the demands of these failing manufacturers, the federation threatened to withdraw from the whole process of national agreements in the industry unless the NUBSO accepted major changes in terms and conditions.⁽⁸⁰⁾ As loyal FBSMA members Northampton's fifty principal shoe manufacturers felt obliged to go along with that policy. But they were not prepared to contemplate facing a strike and they were not enthusiastic about the disruption of the industrial relations policies they preferred. Events like the 1925 pageant and the Festival Trades Exhibition in 1930 reflected middle class confidence in the social homogeneity of Northampton. Even in 1931 at the height of the national political crisis and in the context of rapidly rising unemployment the Northampton Independent commented on a local march of the unemployed in complacent terms. According to the editor "the men were as orderly as if they were in the army" and:-

No one dreamed of special constables. No one thought of mobilising the regular police force. We knew that the good sense of the men would keep them from the slightest show of violence.⁽⁸¹⁾

77. NUBSO Monthly Report March 1933

78. NUBSO Monthly Report April 1933

79. Northampton Independent, 23rd March 1934 and 8th March 1935

80. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp513-515

81. Northampton Independent, 17th October 1931

But post 1933 period saw a distinct change in tone. Public figures : the Chief Constable, ministers of religion and politicians, began to express unease. They ceased congratulating Northampton on its immunity from the evils of the age and began to warn of deterioration. The Chief Constable was puzzled and frustrated by the rising tide of juvenile crime.⁽⁸²⁾ Justices of the Peace commented on the "mindless destruction"⁽⁸³⁾ committed by young offenders. Ministers expressed their alarm at the atheistic drift of the community and again saw the young as the chief problem.⁽⁸⁴⁾ The events of 1933 and 1934 had brought to the surface many of the underlying fears which had inspired the drive to give Northampton its united image.

The political circumstances of interwar Northampton were always a problem area for the elite. Manufacturer and tradesman co-operation had not been matched by party political unity. Liberalism had been under pressure since before the Great War. By 1918 the town's industrialists and tradesmen were dispersed amongst three political parties. The NLA still retained the loyalty of many middle ranking shoe manufacturers and the oldest of the 'big four', the Manfield family. But a number of prominent engineers and shoe manufacturers were active in the NCUA. A small but significant minority were founder members of the new NCLP in 1918. William Barratt had been a member of the Northampton SDF since the early 1900's.⁽⁸⁵⁾ His political allegiances had been of little concern to the business community in the pre-war period, when he had been struggling to establish his business. But by the 1920's he was one of the foremost of the town's progressive and successful men.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Barratt's talent and flair for advertising made him a

82. Chronicle and Echo, 24th December 1934 and 27th February 1936

83. Chronicle and Echo, 15th November 1934

84. Chronicle and Echo, 4th November 1933

85. M Dickie, The Ideology of the Northampton Labour Party, p44

86. J B McAndrew, The Boot and Shoe Industry, p101

vital part of the entrepreneurial image projected by the town's industrialists. The Barratt shoe advertisements epitomised the claims of Northampton manufacturers to a special and individual role in business success. They always included a portrait of William Barratt who was usually depicted in conversation with a customer expressing satisfaction at the comfort and quality of the shoes.⁽⁸⁷⁾ W J Bassett Lowke, a pre-war Fabian, also joined the NCLP in 1918. Like Barratt, he was a man with a reputation for a rapid rise to success and a talent for self-advertisement. Bassett Lowke model steam engines were acquiring an international market. The firm's mailorder company excelled in presenting the same qualities of a genius and customer concern claimed by Barratt.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Moreover, Bassett Lowke was even more adept than his fellow socialist in demonstrating the kind of public spirited benevolence required of Northampton businessmen. He was one of the leading figures in the NCC and the Rotary Club.⁽⁸⁹⁾ The Northampton Repertory Theatre Company numbered him amongst its founding directors. Bassett Lowke's personal friendship with George Bernard Shaw gave the theatre the opportunity to stage several Shaw plays.⁽⁹⁰⁾ In effect, the 1920's saw Bassett Lowke's emergence as one of Northampton's cultural pioneers. He was the photographic expert of the NNHS and one of the founders of the section making amateur films.⁽⁹¹⁾ 'New Ways', the house Bassett Lowke had built for himself in 1926, was contemporarily regarded as a unique contribution to modern architecture.⁽⁹²⁾

The conflict between Northampton businessmen's aspirations to unity and their political disunity was only partially and temporarily resolved in 1918.

87. K Brooker, Barratt Arthur William, p187

88. R Fuller, The Bassett Lowke Story, p339

89. R Fuller, The Bassett Lowke Story, pp28, 35-37 and 41

90. A Dyas, Adventures in Repertory, p59

91. The Journal of the Northamptonshire Natural History Society Vol XX
1919-1920, p141

92. N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: Northamptonshire (1961), p346

The National Co-alition allowed the majority of Northampton businessmen to support one parliamentary candidate. Charles McCurdy,⁽⁹³⁾ one of Northampton's pre-war Liberal MPs and a close associate of Lloyd George, became the acknowledged representative of the co-alition in Northampton. The other Northampton Liberal MP, Lees-Smith, was opposed to the co-alition and stood as an independent radical in the Don Valley in 1918. By 1919 Lees-Smith had joined the Labour party.⁽⁹⁴⁾ There was consequently no competition between Northampton's two pre-war MPs for the constituency's remaining seat when re-organisation deprived Northampton of its entitlement to two MPs in 1918. The NCUA was not in a position to advocate its own claims to choose the Northampton representative in a constituency which had long been a Liberal stronghold. But in any case Conservative manufacturers were content to accept McCurdy. He had the advantage of being the sitting MP and had built up an effective reputation for personal charity and for supporting the shoe industry. Like Northampton businessmen McCurdy had a deep distrust of private monopolies as well as state intervention. He chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Trusts in 1918⁽⁹⁵⁾ and expressed scathing criticism of the activities of American financiers in the British market.⁽⁹⁶⁾ In an attempt to protect the shoe industry from the effects of state legislation on national insurance, McCurdy advocated a voluntary scheme between manufacturers and union.⁽⁹⁷⁾ As a member of the government and a Privy Councillor⁽⁹⁸⁾ he could demonstrate that he had influence. During the first few years after the war, when boot and shoe manufacturers were looking forward hopefully to government and banking support for their efforts to regain export markets, McCurdy's patronage seemed important to manufacturers of all parties.

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- 93. Northampton Independent, 14th November 1941
 - 94. ----- Labour Who's Who, p104
 - 95. Northampton Independent, 1st December 1923
 - 96. Northampton Independent, 27th March 1920
 - 97. Northampton Mercury, 28th July 1922
 - 98. Northampton Independent, 1st December 1923

The exclusion of the Labour party from the co-alition was a real disappointment to the NLA. Both the associations' leading supporters and Charles McCurdy himself regarded the new Labour party as an aberration. They persisted in viewing it as an uneven and unnatural alliance between radical trade unionists and a new type of bolshevik and pacifist element.⁽⁹⁹⁾ For Liberals one of the most important aims of post war politics was to re-establish the cross class unity of organised labour and liberalism, in parallel with the new co-partnership between employers and employees. But in the realm of parliamentary politics this proved to be an impossible vision. It was one which, as some of its proponents realised quite early, was handicapped by the new association between Conservatives and Liberals. It is significant that in Northampton the agitation against the co-alition started in early 1921 and stemmed from the NLA⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ not the NCUA. In 1922, when the government fell, McCurdy was faced with an Independent Liberal opponent not a Conservative.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ The majority of the NLA and its leading businessmen activists supported the Independent Liberal. McCurdy, indeed, denounced his rival as the protege of the "Abington Street millionaires"⁽¹⁰²⁾ even though his own main backing now came from the Conservatives.

The consequences of such political disarray in the business community were apparent in 1923, when the Conservatives finally put forward a candidate of their own.⁽¹⁰³⁾ The General Election of that year resulted in McCurdy, the sitting MP, coming bottom of the poll. The almost equal division of the Liberal and Conservative vote allowed the Labour party to take the seat for the first time. For the local press it was abundantly clear that it was the division and dispute within the business community which had brought about

99. Northampton Daily Echo, 4th and 7th December 1918 and Northampton Independent, 27th March 1920

100. Northampton Independent, 8th January 1921 and Northampton Mercury, 8th July 1921

101. Northampton Mercury, 13th January 1922

102. Northampton Independent, 5th May 1922

103. Northampton Conservative and Unionist Association Minutes
13th November 1923

the shock result. J V Collier, the Conservative candidate, was a Northampton man. He was the son of a prominent shoe manufacturer and himself a successful engineer. As a supporter of Baldwin's tariff reform ideas, Collier's candidacy had little support amongst shoe manufacturers and some Conservative industrialists were suspected of covertly supporting McCurdy.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ But it was also widely believed that many "wee frees" had voted Labour rather than support McCurdy and through him Lloyd George.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ The 1924 election campaign provided a postscript to three years of political bickering within the party organisations. The NCUA refused to re-select Collier. Under the guidance of H W Dover, the engineering employer, the association chose General Sir Arthur Holland, a more traditional County candidate.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ J V Collier resigned from the NCUA. He returned to the fold not long afterwards, but at the time he made his resentment of the party's reliance on County men and their money very public.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ In 1924, in an effort to re-unite their divided forces the NLA selected James Manfield, whose father Sir Philip Manfield had been Northampton's MP in the 1890's.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ But despite James Manfield's claims to represent the Northampton interest over and above the divisions of party politics, the Liberal vote fell by around 5%, leaving the party bottom of the poll once again. In 1924, Northampton elected a Conservative MP for the first time since 1895. Neither the NLA nor the NCUA ever again tried to put forward a parliamentary candidate from within the town's business community. General Sir Arthur Holland from 1924 to 1928 and Sir Mervyn Manningham Buller who represented Northampton from 1931 to 1941, were men who lacked urban sympathies.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Manningham Buller played little part in the

104. Northampton Independent, 24th November 1923

105. Northampton Independent, 18th October 1924

106. Northampton Conservative and Unionist Association Minutes 21st November 1927

107. Northampton Conservative and Unionist Association Minutes 21st November 1927

108. Northampton Independent, 18th October 1924

109. Northampton Independent, 10th December 1927 contains an obituary to Sir Arthur Holland (MP for Northampton 1924-1927) describing him as "a soldier rather than a politician". Chronicle and Echo, 30th October 1935 gives a biography of Sir Mervyn Manningham Buller (MP for Northampton 1931-1940) with a strong emphasis on his previous army career

shoe manufacturer[?] attempts to gain state support for the shoe industry or the campaign against Bata.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Thus the defeat of Charles McCurdy in 1923 marked both the end of Liberal dominance in the constituency and the beginning of a period of alienation between industrialists and Northampton's parliamentary representatives. The FBSMA was not part of the industrial lobby Middlemas describes as having influence within the state.⁽¹¹¹⁾ Shoe manufacturers like local tradesmen, engineers and printers adopted a tone of hostility toward government almost comparable with their attitude to foreign competitors and financiers. All governments, whatever their political complexion, were seen as lacking understanding of Northampton's problems.

Yet while parliamentary politics proved to be an area in which business leaders could not co-operate or re-enforce the sense of partnership within the Northampton community, municipal politics still attracted interest and involvement. Between 1919 and 1939 manufacturers accounted for 26% of serving councillors and just under half of them were boot and shoe manufacturers. Industrialists were only slightly outnumbered by tradesmen, who made up 28% of the total. Builders, with 10% of the membership^(table 3) tipped the balance decisively in favour of the special interests of businessmen whose prosperity depended entirely on the fortunes of the local economy. Three of the major industrialists: the Manfields, Sears and Bostocks, did not stand for office in the interwar period. William Barratt became a member of the Labour group in the 1930's.⁽¹¹²⁾ But the under-representation of the town's most prominent businessmen on the town council does not seem to indicate the same alienation from local politics as was apparent in

110. Parliamentary Debates Official Report, fifth series, Vol 266 (23rd May 1931 to 10th June 1932), pp49, 1507, 1772 and Vol 279 (13th June 1932 to 30th June 1933), pp314 and 640. Manningham Buller made two interventions in debates over Bata, both after the factory at Tilbury had been built. By comparison he made five contributions to debates on town and country planning

111. K Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society*, pp182-183

112. *Northampton Corporation Minutes 1901-1940*

parliamentary terms. Membership of the Borough Council had special attractions for the middle rank of manufacturers and well established tradesmen and builders. The municipal forum allowed their claims to status greater exposure than voluntary charitable work. Unable to compete with the larger manufacturers in demonstrations of personal generosity they looked to public office for recognition of their own qualities of leadership and benevolence. Although Councillors had to pass through the combative process of democratic election, some of their number could look forward to being selected as Aldermen or even Mayor. It is notable that tradesmen and builders were over represented in these positions.^(table 3) Whilst in reality selections were subject to intense party political bargaining behind the scenes, by tradition Mayors and Aldermen were selected by unanimous vote in the Council chamber.⁽¹¹³⁾ Office holders had the satisfaction of being approved in public by their peers, as men of outstanding ability and altruism. Once in office, the mayor in particular was lifted above party politics. He was the 'first citizen' and 'chief magistrate' of Northampton. On royal visits and in other public ceremonies the mayor represented the town. During the mayoral year he presided over all the town's main charity committees.⁽¹¹⁴⁾

A role in municipal politics also gave businessmen an opportunity to be especially associated with activities obviously designed to demonstrate social unity, for example, Armistice Day commemoration. At memorial services held in remembrance of the war dead the Mayor and Aldermen headed the procession with Councillors following closely behind.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Business leaders did seek to promote their own direct claims to representation at the event. There was always an official delegation from the Chamber of Commerce,⁽¹¹⁶⁾ even

113. Northampton Corporation Minutes 1901-1940

114. Northampton Corporation Minutes 1901-1940

115. Northampton Independent, 10th November 1928, 16th November 1929 and 14th November 1931

116. Northampton Independent, 10th November 1928

though trade unions were not specifically represented. With the exception of the Borough Council and the Chamber of Commerce only the British Legion and the Northamptonshire regiments were recognised participants. As well as the annual service there was a regular concert⁽¹¹⁷⁾ in aid of the wounded and their families and a 'poppy day' collection. The Manfield choir⁽¹¹⁸⁾ usually accompanied the British Legion Band at the concert and businessmen and their families were prominent amongst the volunteers manning street collection points.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Both shopkeepers and manufacturers made sure collection boxes were prominently displayed at the place of work.

CONCLUSION

The evidence so far presented demonstrates that Northampton businessmen had not lost interest in shaping the social consciousness of their fellow citizens. On the contrary they were more committed than ever to highlighting their claims to represent Northampton. The image business leaders cultivated for themselves and for the town was one of progress and efficiency combined with service to the common interest. But that image was in danger of being undermined by economic failure and political disunity. In the following chapter we will explore the Borough Council's major contribution to resolving those economic and social problems.

117. Northampton Daily Echo, 6th October 1924

118. Northampton Daily Echo, 6th October 1924

119. Northampton Independent, 10th November 1928

TABLE 3

OCCUPATIONS OF MEMBERS OF
NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL 1918-1939

<u>OCCUPATIONAL GROUP</u>	<u>COUNCILLORS</u>	<u>MAYORS</u>	<u>ALDERMEN</u>
	%	%	%
Manufacturers	26	27	16
Builders	8	14	11
Tradesmen	28	36	38
Professionals	14	18	19
Other	24	5	16

SOURCE: Northampton Municipal Year Books 1918-1939

Women Councillors, of whom there were six during the period, are described in the Year Books as married women. Either their occupation prior to marriage or husband's occupation have been used to establish status.

CHAPTER 3

PROGRESS EFFICIENCY AND SERVICE TO THE COMMON INTEREST

INTRODUCTION

The dignified and ceremonial aspects of local government were attractive to Northampton businessmen. But the daily life of the Council, its policies and administration, were subject to a political system which emphasised conflict between Parties. Furthermore, the autonomy which industrialists enjoyed in the exercise of workplace benevolence and voluntary charity was not fully available in the Council. The policies of central governments and the dogma of national party politics had an important impact on the conduct of local affairs. Nevertheless there was considerable opportunity for Councillors to shape the political culture of the town to suit their patriotic inclinations and in the process to meet the material needs of the town economy.

ELECTION PACTS AND ALLIANCES

The 1919 municipal elections in Northampton were officially the subject of a pact between the NLA and NCUA. The two parties avoided contesting seats against one another, although they did not abandon their party labels. Despite the fact that Council elections had been suspended since 1913, 1919 was treated as a normal annual election. Only one third of the seats were vacated and thus the composition of the Council was as much affected by the results of pre-war elections as by the 1919 contest. The Conservatives lost one seat, having given a free run to an ex-service candidate. But they were still the largest single group on the Council, with 16 members. The Liberals also lost seats and were reduced to twelve from fourteen before the war.

The new Labour group consisted of seven Councillors, an improvement of two on the SDF's pre-war position.^(table 4) The Aldermen selected in 1913 remained in place not being due for retirement until the following year. No single party could claim overall control of the Council. Even with the co-operation of the ex-service Councillor the Conservatives were not in a position to dictate policy, but the Liberals could only be a junior partner in an alliance between Conservatives and Liberals. Despite the new conditions created by the electoral pact, therefore, it was tempting for the Liberal group to revert to its pre-war policy of an alliance with the socialists. But if the series of votes, deciding the composition of Council Committees, had simply been based on a Liberal-Labour and Conservative-ex-service alliance, the result would have been a deadlock. The concessions which were made to the Labour group actually involved a more complex division of opinion. Five Conservatives voted to include an extra three Labour councillors on the Tramways committee and to expand the Housing and Town Planning Committee membership to include two more Labour councillors. Five Conservatives abstained, leaving only thirteen to actively oppose. The division within the Conservative group continued in subsequent votes and as a consequence three Labour councillors were appointed to committee chairs.⁽¹⁾ As a result of these votes, Labour had 13% of the Council's committee chairmanships, a fair allocation in view of the fact that they composed 16% of Council membership, Councillor Robinson, who had been the socialist's only committee chair before the war continued to lead the Public Libraries and Museum Committee. Mrs Rose Scott, Northampton's only woman Councillor, was given the Chair of the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee. Councillor Slinn, the leader of the Labour group, was allocated the Chair of the Housing and Town Planning Committee.⁽²⁾

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1. Northampton Corporation Minutes 10-12th November 1919
 2. Northampton Corporation Minutes 10-12th November 1919

Housing was an issue of the utmost political importance in the immediately post war period. Resentment against 'profiteering' landlords had become an acknowledged source of working class unrest nationally. The coalition government moved quickly onto the offensive, allocating government grants for the construction of council housing and demanding that local Councils submit plans and building proposals.⁽³⁾ Housing shortages, the result of four years of wartime restrictions on building, had a tendency to thwart even the legal restraints on rent increases imposed by wartime governments, and there was a thriving black market in high rent tenancies. The building societies early boasts about the town's well housed population and high proportion of working class homeowners made this a particularly sensitive issue in Northampton. The labour movement locally had been quick to recognise the issue's potential. Northampton Trades Council, the Women's Co-operative Guild and Socialist Councillors had combined their efforts to produce a comprehensive survey of Northampton's housing in the latter part of the war. They had then proposed that the authority should build over 3000 new homes.⁽⁴⁾ Before 1919 a majority on the Council had only very reluctantly conceded the necessity of building around 500 dwellings.⁽⁵⁾ During their election canvassing Councillors may have become more aware of the intensity of local feeling on the subject. It is notable that even in 1925, canvassers involved in the town's second poverty survey, acknowledged that this was the issue on which most respondents were vocal and discontented.⁽⁶⁾

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSENSUS

In deciding to allow the leader of the Labour group to take over the chairmanship of the Housing and Town Planning Committee, Conservative and

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3. S Merrett, State Housing in Britain (1979), p33
 4. Northampton Housing and Town Planning Committee Minutes July 1916
 5. Northampton Housing and Town Planning Committee Minutes November 1918
 6. A L Bowley, Has Poverty Diminished? (1925), pp52-53

Liberal Councillors were putting into socialist hands the most sensitive and volatile issue in the municipality. At least initially some Councillors may have regarded the decision as a means of exposing the group to failure. The editor of the Northampton Independent hinted at this when he argued that one of the most convincing arguments for giving Labour a role in the town's administration was that it would demonstrate their so far "untried" capacity for decision making. The "unfettered critic"⁽⁷⁾ would now be able to be held responsible for the success or failure of Council policy. But in the months which followed there emerged a real consensus on the housing programme and an all party commitment to its success. The committees' decision, under the guidance of Councillor Slinn, to commission a plan for the "development and reconstruction of Northampton" from a private firm of architects and town planners played an important part in the process. The firm was charged with the task of producing recommendations "in the interests of the industrial efficiency, convenience and amenity"⁽⁸⁾ of the town. The estimates made of the level of housing need in Northampton were, therefore, closely linked to recommendations for road improvements, new public buildings and parks and formed part of a package aimed at producing the greater industrial diversification which local businessmen agreed was necessary. The full report was not completed and published until 1925, but the consultants worked closely with the Northampton MOH on the housing survey the committee commissioned as the basis of its submissions for government housing grants. Incidentally, that survey confirmed precisely the findings of the earlier labour movement survey of housing need in the town.⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore, the opening of the 'waiting list' served to confirm the existence of a clamorous demand for accommodation.⁽¹⁰⁾ It was difficult for an elite, convinced of

7. Northampton Independent, 8th November 1919

8. Thomas Mawson and Sons, Proposals for Development, preface

9. Thomas Mawson and Sons, Proposals for Development, p53

10. Northampton Housing and Town Planning Committee Minutes May 1922. The waiting list contained 1405 applicants of whom 1006 were ex-servicemen

its obligation to benevolence, to resist seeing the housing programme as a patriotic and progressive endeavour.

The inevitable delays in construction created by a post war shortage of building materials and skilled labour, provided ample opportunity for scapegoating the Labour Housing chairman, but instead the Council united in supporting his efforts. They voted in favour of purchasing two brickworks⁽¹¹⁾ to overcome a shortage of materials. The Addison Added Powers Act,⁽¹²⁾ was fully utilised. Local builders and even labour movement leaders had reservations about the restrictions it imposed. But objections from NUBSO officials and the Northampton Co-operative Society, when council house building took precedence over the completion of the new Co-operative Boot and Shoe factory, were ignored.⁽¹³⁾ The Northampton Master Builders Federation very quickly came to realise that the Council's housing estates were a greater potential source of work than privately commissioned building, for by the early months of 1920 local builders were already being allocated contracts for council housing.⁽¹⁴⁾ Their only concern was to ensure that builders who were council members were not excluded from these lucrative contracts. In a bid to avoid government regulations in this respect, NMBF agreed with the Council on a rota system rather than competitive tenders.⁽¹⁵⁾

In parliament there was a growing disposition to regard public spending as a handicap to economic prosperity.⁽¹⁶⁾ But, in Northampton, the Conservative Chairman of the Finance Committee was a lone voice counselling caution. He

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- 11. Northampton Corporation Minutes 7th June 1920 and 5/6th July 1920
 - 12. S Merrett, State Housing, p36. The Addison Added Powers Act 1919 gave local authorities power to suspend private building activity in order to recruit labour for public schemes
 - 13. Northampton Corporation Minutes 26th July 1920
 - 14. Northampton Corporation Minutes 25th November 1919
 - 15. Northampton Corporation Minutes 16th February 1920 and 3rd May 1920
 - 16. A J P Taylor, English History, p240

"hinted"⁽¹⁷⁾ that the Council might be wise to suspend its housing activities once the 500 houses they had agreed upon during the war had been completed. But he had little support within his own group. Housing committee members such as J V Collier, the Conservative deputy chair of the committee, were as anxious to proceed as Labour and Liberal Councillors. To a majority of the Council the problem was not that they were going too fast but that they were not moving fast enough. In 1920 the Housing Committee unanimously supported a resolution deploring the governments attempts to lay the blame for housing completion delays on local authorities. With some indignation they protested that "any delays have been caused by the various regulations and restrictions of the Government and its departments".⁽¹⁸⁾ By 1922 the success of the housing programme was being confirmed by the local press. The completion of a new housing estate was greeted with banner headlines: "the Best in England"⁽¹⁹⁾ crowed the Northampton Independent reporting on a pioneering scheme for concrete houses. The editor went on to praise the Housing Chairman and the Committee for their forward looking approach and determination in getting the programme underway. Thus while Conservative Councillors were vociferous in their criticism of the extravagance of their Liberal and Labour colleagues for employing an assistant medical officer for the care of pregnant women,⁽²⁰⁾ they continued to express resentment when co-alition and later Conservative governments attempted to restrict council house building.⁽²¹⁾ There was no welcome for Conservative government's decision to restrict subsidies and encourage Councils to sell off land to private developers. Conservative Councillors supported delegations demanding that subsidies continue.⁽²²⁾ Forced to accept that government support was not forthcoming they voted for the programme to continue without subsidy.⁽²³⁾

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- 17. Northampton Herald, 15th October 1920
 - 18. Northampton Housing and Town Planning Committee Minutes January 1920
 - 19. Northampton Independent, 14th February 1922
 - 20. Northampton Herald, 15th October 1920
 - 21. Northampton Mercury, 14th July 1922
 - 22. Northampton Housing and Town Planning Committee January 1922
 - 23. Northampton Mercury, 26th May 1922 and 7th July 1922

According to J V Collier, speaking at a meeting of the Northampton Ratepayers Association in October 1922, council housing was "a great moral revolution for good and a sound financial investment".⁽²⁴⁾ Significantly, even in this venue, there were no voices raised in protest. The unanimity of influential opinion on the subject of housing remained firm in what were now depression conditions in local industry. The winter of 1920 to 1921 saw a rapid rise in unemployment in the shoe industry and increasing calls on the Board of Guardians for assistance.⁽²⁵⁾ There had been a spate of well publicised evictions in the wake of the Conservative Government's rent deregulation legislation.⁽²⁶⁾ Challenges to Northampton's claims to being progressive, efficient and above all humane, galvanised politicians of all parties to a rhetoric of hostility toward profiteering landlords and faceless bureaucrats in Whitehall. Councillor Slinn urged Northamptonians to erect barricades against the bailiffs and Councillor Collier insisted that the Northampton police should go "not one whit further than the law compels"⁽²⁷⁾ in assisting evictions. Conservative Councillors clearly felt particularly vulnerable to the charge that they were themselves involved in landlordism. One Councillor went so far as to state in his election leaflets that the rents of his houses were still set at pre-war levels.⁽²⁸⁾ The accidental naming of a Councillor as the subject of an order compelling him to repair his property caused a flurry in the chamber.⁽²⁹⁾ One Labour Councillor threatened writs against Councillors who had a financial interest in the Council's proceedings.⁽³⁰⁾ The idea of impartial service to the common interest was being called into question. For both Liberals and Conservatives the only

24. Northampton Independent, 21st October 1922

25. A L Bowley, *Has Poverty Diminished?*, p57. In January 1921 7000 men and women were registered at the Northampton Employment Exchange or 16% of the workforce

26. N Branson, Britain in the Nineteen Twenties (1975), p112

27. Northampton Daily Echo, 9th June 1925

28. Northampton Independent, 28th October 1922

29. Northampton Corporation Minutes 1st December 1919

30. Northampton Daily Echo, 7th October 1924

response appropriate to such circumstances was a renewed commitment to benevolent activity and a rejection of government measures which thwarted that intent.

Rising unemployment provided a practical argument for continuing with a policy of municipal intervention. Public works, laying the foundations for new council estates, constructing new roads and clearing land for parks, placed some of the burden of maintaining the unemployed on the tax payer rather than the rate payer. The Council had developed a complex but effective scheme for employing men part time on such projects and making up their wages from unemployment benefit.⁽³¹⁾ The grants and subsidies which the Council received for public works were used, together with unemployment benefit for men on short time, as a means of reducing claims on the Board of Guardians. Private employers and the local authority shared a common policy on the issue. Shoe firms in Northampton also preferred short time working or unpaid holidays to dismissals.⁽³²⁾ Thus the co-alition government's refusal to sanction several public works schemes put forward in 1921, as well as the cessation of housing subsidies, produced a united response. Delegations were sent to Whitehall to complain. The press called on Charles McCurdy to intervene.⁽³³⁾ Northampton was under attack by outsiders.

By 1922 Northampton's Councillors had replicated in the local state most of the beliefs and attitudes dominant in the commercial and voluntary sector. They were committed to taking an active role in the local economy and for the welfare of the town's citizens. Councillors regardless of party, believed in

31. A L Bowley, *Has Poverty Diminished?* p57

32. A L Bowley, *Has Poverty Diminished?* p57. Of the 7000 registered unemployed in Northampton in January 1921, only 1444 were wholly unemployed, all the others were on short time or laid off

33. Northampton Independent, 21st January 1922 and Northampton Mercury, 11th February 1921

the farsightedness and outstanding ability of elected members and saw themselves as acting for the common interest. Northampton patriotism, in the council chamber and outside, involved protecting the town's unity and prosperity. No party or sectarian motive should prevent all its leaders presenting a united front to outsiders. For most of the 1920's this required Conservative Councillors to adopt a position in conflict with that of their party nationally but there seems to have been little difficulty in maintaining the consensus.

Conservative numbers on the Council were rising in 1921 and 1922. In the 1921 elections they gained three seats and in 1922 added two more to make their complement of Councillors twenty in all. The Liberals also gained an additional Councillor in 1921. Labour was reduced from its peak of eight in 1920 to four in 1921 and to only three in 1922. The Conservatives loss of two Aldermanic places to the Liberals in 1921 left the balance of power unchanged, but in 1922 the Conservatives briefly gained one party control and then from 1924 to 1928 they were again in a majority on the Council. (table 4) Council policy was not, however, affected and it was under a *conservative* majority that the authority achieved its highest level of annual housing completion. (table 5) The threat of cuts in government housing subsidy led to strenuous efforts to build while the higher grant was still available. (34) Some of the most adventurous schemes planned by Labour and Liberal Councillors in 1919 were abandoned in 1920 and 1921 when it became obvious that central government was not going to fulfil its expected promise. Plans for a municipal savings bank and a municipal bakery to supply bread at cost price to the poor (35) were casualties of the failure of optimism in this period. But new infant welfare centres and the employment of the assistant medical officer for the care of pregnant women survived despite the Conservatives original objections. (36)

34. S Merrett, State Housing, p47

35. Northampton Corporation Minutes 12th April and 3rd May 1920

36. Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1919-1939

Nationally the drive had only just begun to bring the proportion of non-fee paying children in secondary schools up from 33% to around 47%.⁽³⁷⁾ But in 1924 between 40% and 45% of pupils at the main secondary schools in Northampton were on 'free places'.⁽³⁸⁾ Day-continuation courses for workers under 18 years of age lost national funding after the 'Geddes Axe' fell in 1921⁽³⁹⁾ yet the Council persisted in funding classes one morning a week for 14 to 16 year olds at the Northampton Technical School. They received the co-operation of boot and shoe employers, who voluntarily released their operatives for the half day. No fees were charged for these first and second year junior courses and senior full time courses were available for 16 year olds free, on completion of a scholarship examination.⁽⁴⁰⁾ This commitment to infant welfare and education, particularly to technical education, conformed to the image of Northampton as a meritocracy and to the demands of local industry for a well educated and skilled workforce.

At first sight the most surprising area of continued consensus was in the allocation of chairmanships and committee places. The number of places and chairs the Labour group held rose and fell in line with the number of Labour Councillors in a given year, but no attempt was made to deprive the group of its one Aldermanic seat or the chair of the Housing and Town Planning Committee.⁽⁴¹⁾ The theory of co-partnership in industry was amongst the weakest elements in the Northampton businessmen's philosophy and usually only means only an extension of paternalism, but in the council chamber tradesmen and manufacturers expressly extended the title of public leader to men and women they still described as representatives of the working class interest.

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- 37. N Branson, Britain in the Nineteen Twenties, p124
 - 38. A L Bowley, Has Poverty Diminished? pp55-56
 - 39. N Branson, Britain in the Nineteen Twenties, p124
 - 40. A L Bowley, Has Poverty Diminished? pp55-56
 - 41. Northampton Corporation Minutes 1919-1939

The division between rhetoric and practice in this respect reflected the contradiction between the image of the Labour party decreed by party dogma and the reality of the status of many Labour Councillors. Many Labour Aldermen and Councillors were themselves small businessmen; others were professional and white collar workers,^(table 6) including some of the trade union officials with whom Northampton industrialists worked on arbitration boards. There was the occasional furore in the chamber when Labour Councillors denounced the class bias of Conservatives and Liberals alike.⁽⁴²⁾ Liberal and Conservative candidates often claimed that they were seeking election as "businessmen" or "employers of labour".⁽⁴³⁾ However, the social divisions amongst elected representatives were really rather blurred. In the absence of substantial policy difference it was easier to avoid an open battle over committee places and retain the illusion that such positions were allocated on merit, by unanimous agreement. The Housing chairman's position, at the head of a committee which had wholesale public approval, made it particularly difficult to deny his personal claims to a leading role.

Northampton was not entirely immune from changes in national attitudes. In the wake of the General Strike, for example, the editor of the Northampton Independent attempted to mobilise middle class opinion in support of what was tantamount to an anti-Labour alliance. Over the period 1927 to 1929 in a series of articles he argued that the town would be better governed if the "best men" of the Liberal and Conservative parties came together to select candidates on the basis of their "business capabilities alone" and ran for office under the title of the "Townsmans Party".⁽⁴⁴⁾ But this attempt to

42. Northampton Daily Echo, 10th March 1925

43. Northampton Independent, 27th October 1923. Paid advertisements placed by NLA and NCUA

44. Northampton Independent, 5th February 1927, 8th and 20th October 1927 and 3rd November 1928

exclude Labour from administration came to nothing. The idea was resurrected in 1931, when the economic crisis and the formation of the National Government offered a model which briefly attracted some interest in Northampton.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The Chamber of Trade announced its support for a local government consisting solely of businessmen and orientated toward making "savings" and "economies" in expenditure.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The desire for retrenchment was, however, not sufficiently widespread or sustained to really affect local politics. By 1932 representatives of the NMBF were speaking with scathing sarcasm of the National Government's "passion for economy"⁽⁴⁷⁾ and the disastrous effect it was having on the local building industry. The NRA ran some candidates for the first time in 1933⁽⁴⁸⁾ but none of them were successful and no more were fielded until 1938.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Conservative Councillors adopted some of the phraseology of the 'economy' advocates⁽⁵⁰⁾ but in practice they responded to government withdrawals of support in much the same way they had in the 1920's. The suspension of government grants for housing waiting list applicants led to more delegations to London to demand that subsidies continue, at least whilst unemployment was so high.⁽⁵¹⁾ When it became clear that grants would be available for housing to replace cleared slums, the Council moved quickly in preparing a clearance programme. The authority claimed that it was "the first in the country"⁽⁵²⁾ to have plans ready for approval and once again blamed government for delays in putting the schemes into effect. The Housing Committee received approval once more to build unsubsidised housing, in an attempt to meet the

45. Northampton Independent, 31st October 1931

46. Northampton Independent, 7th November 1931

47. Chronicle and Echo, 11th February 1933

48. Chronicle and Echo, 9th November 1933

49. Mercury and Herald, 4th November 1938

50. Chronicle and Echo, 7th March and 28th September 1932 and Mercury and Herald, 11th March 1932

51. Chronicle and Echo, 1st February 1933

52. Chronicle and Echo, 27th April 1933

continued needs of the waiting list.⁽⁵³⁾ During the 1930's Labour Councillors expressed doubts about Northampton Conservatives' commitment to the housing policy, but the only evidence they could find for this was the unwillingness of some Conservatives to countenance the building of flats in the town centre. Conservative Councillors actually showed a greater disposition to challenge government's parsimony than their Liberal and Labour colleagues. Conservatives argued that the Council should not submit to government directives to build "barrack like erections"⁽⁵⁴⁾ Northampton's respectable working class should continue to be provided for in more spacious and attractive estates on the outskirts of the town. It was the Conservative's determination to avoid the social evils of crammed tenements which finally persuaded the government to allow Northampton to build small blocks of three and four storey flats on its cleared sites.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Nationally, the 1930's was a period in which the Labour party was defined as unpatriotic and excluded from government. Parliament became pre-occupied with retrenchment and economy.⁽⁵⁶⁾ But in Northampton longer established habits of thinking remained dominant. This was not simply a matter of habit, new developments contributed to the re-enforcement of earlier ideas. It is notable, for example, that rateable value revaluation did not give any additional impetus to ratepayer groups in the town.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The Borough Council's application to Parliament for a Borough Boundary Extension Bill resulted in the incorporation of additional ratepayers into the town in 1932.⁽⁵⁸⁾ The increased income provided allowed the authority to keep rates down even though

53. Northampton Corporation Minutes, 29th July 1935

54. Chronicle and Echo, 30th October 1934

55. Chronicle and Echo, 31st October 1934

56. A J P Taylor, English History, pp405-412

57. J Boughton, Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield, p208
 . refers to the derating of industry and agriculture in 1928 and the
 . domestic rates revaluation which followed as causing local resentment

58. Mercury and Herald, 20th March 1931

their costs were rising. The composition of the Council and party political considerations also affected local thinking. In 1930 the municipality once again reverted to having no majority controlling party. The low level of Labour representation, which had been a feature of the mid 1920's, was followed by a gradual increase in the number of Labour Councillors. Labour now had ten Councillors and three Aldermen to the Liberals' ten Councillors and four Aldermen. Though Labour lost a seat at the full election held on the new Borough boundary in 1932, for most of the 1930's it had parity with the Liberals.^(table 4) Until 1937 the Council remained 'hung' and then only briefly fell under Conservative control once again. The necessity for compromise in order for Council business to be done favoured the tendency to pragmatism which had long been a factor in Northampton local government.

Up until 1930 the Northampton Labour group had remained aloof from one important aspect of Council life. They had refused to offer candidates for the Mayoralty.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The groups' leaders had argued that since the Mayor had to pay all the expenses of his year of office *working class* office holders were prohibited.⁽⁶⁰⁾ For both Liberals and Conservatives the *non-partisan* status of the Mayor was fundamental to the Council's claim to represent the common interest. Labour argued that the matter could be resolved if the Council made a grant to the Mayor for his year of office. In 1930 Liberal members supported Labour and the grant was implemented.⁽⁶¹⁾ Thereafter, Mayors were selected on the basis of proportional representation like committee chairs and Aldermanic places. With the agreement of all parties Labour was offered the Mayoralty for 1931 and again for 1934 as part of a seven year plan for the office.⁽⁶²⁾ Thus, in November 1931, when the national

59. Mercury and Herald, 13th November 1931

60. Chronicle and Echo, 28th September 1932

61. Northampton Independent, 2nd November 1929

62. Minutes of the Northampton Constituency Labour Party - Labour group meeting May 1934

atmosphere was one of hostility to Labour's claims to legitimacy in the political system, Northampton's first Labour Mayor was due to take office. As already noted, this was the point at which the Chamber of Trade announced its support for the idea of a 'Townsmans Party' and the exclusion of the Labour party from local administration. But Labour's Mayor elect had fallen ill in October and died a matter of weeks before he should have been sworn in. Alderman Slinn, Chairman of the Housing Committee since 1919, had been the Labour's obvious choice as their first Mayor. His death transformed the local political atmosphere. A few months earlier the serving Mayor had raised a testimonial to recognise the contribution of this "self sacrificing"⁽⁶³⁾ public worker. The new Chronicle and Echo reported extensively on the unanimous expressions of grief in the Council at the Mayor elect's death.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The civic funeral received front page coverage.

For the Chronicle and Echo's editor the event was an ideal opportunity to stress the consensual values the newspaper had so recently espoused. The tragic death of one of Northampton's 'first citizens' only weeks before he had been due to receive that title officially was a remarkable story. The demonstration of social unity which it evoked was probably enough in itself to discourage the growth of an anti-Labour alliance. But in addition, the Labour group had been recently re-enforced with other individuals who had a special claim to respect. Bassett Lowke had become a Labour Councillor in the 1920's⁽⁶⁵⁾ and had been accepted as Chair of the Baths Committee and William Barratt had also joined the Labour group.⁽⁶⁶⁾ In 1932 and 1933 two outstanding men from the other side of industry were elected as Labour members. F O Roberts, who had been secretary of Northampton Trades Council until 1918,

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- 63. Northampton Independent, 19th April 1930
 - 64. Chronicle and Echo, 5th November 1931
 - 65. R Fuller, The Bassett Lowke Story, p339
 - 66. Northampton Herald, 8th November 1929

had now lost the parliamentary seat at West Bromwich and turned to local politics.⁽⁶⁷⁾ As a Minister in two Labour Governments he was regarded as one of Northampton's successful native sons⁽⁶⁸⁾ and the Northampton Independent greeted his election with pleasure. According to the editor, F O Roberts' "value to the Council needs no emphasis".⁽⁶⁹⁾ E L Poulton, the recently retired General Secretary of NUBSO, had likewise proved his claims to status on the national stage⁽⁷⁰⁾ and was given an unreserved welcome by the local press.

In the Winter of 1932 unemployment in Northampton reached unprecedented heights. Over 11500 people were registered with the local Employment Exchange in December of that year by comparison with 8000 in the previous December.⁽⁷¹⁾ Almost one quarter of the workforce were either laid off or wholly unemployed. The Northampton PAC had 567 cases on its books, more than double the highest level of claims on the old Board of Guardians.⁽⁷²⁾ In the Winter of 1920 to 1921, when other towns had experienced unemployed riots, Northampton had seemed immune from such troubles. There had been one or two short strikes among the men employed on public works schemes but they had soon been resolved. The British Legion, rather than any overtly political organisation, had acted as the mediator in the disputes.⁽⁷³⁾ In 1932, however, a local branch of the NUWM was formed amidst acrimonious scenes⁽⁷⁴⁾ at the trades council. A meeting called by the Labour Mayor to form an Unemployed Social Service Centre was broken up in confusion when members of

67. A E Musson, The Typographical Association (1954), pp404-407

68. Northampton Mercury, 11th February 1921 reports that F O Roberts MP has been presented with a public testimonial by the Mayor of Northampton "for many years devotion to philanthropic, social and political institutions in Northampton"

69. Northampton Independent, 26th March 1932

70. -----Labour Who's Who lists E L Poulton OBE, JP as the ex-Mayor of Northampton (1906) and present General Secretary of NUBSO. He was also Vice Chairman of the General Council of the TUC and its representative to the ILO in Geneva

71. Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1931-1933

72. Northampton Herald, 13th October 1922

73. Northampton Mercury, 8th July 1921 and Northampton Independent,
21st January 1922

74. Chronicle and Echo, 30th September 1932

the NUWM and the ILP accused Church and Chapel leaders of doing nothing for the unemployed.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The spectacle of reputable leaders of local society, the Mayor, the Chief Constable and Ministers of Religion being heckled at a public meeting was an unusual one in Northampton. The Chronicle and Echo reported both this event and the subsequent interchange of 'open letters' between the ILP and Northampton church leaders under banner headlines.⁽⁷⁶⁾ The ILP challenged the churches to engage in a public debate on the issue. The public meeting and debate coincided with arrival of two NUWM organised 'Hunger Marches' which passed through Northampton on the same weekend.⁽⁷⁷⁾ In May 1933 the ILP caused another major incident by carrying the image of a "crucified boy on a cross of gold" in the May Day procession. The tableaux representing labour crucified by Capital was considered "blasphemous"⁽⁷⁸⁾ by the Chief Constable and he had it removed from the procession. Unemployed agitation appeared to be waning in 1933 and the levels of unemployment were beginning to decline.⁽⁷⁹⁾ But then disputes in the shoe industry in 1933 and 1934 emerged as another source of anxiety and conflict.

The Northampton Borough Council's response to the social conflict was to re-emphasise the consensus in a manner comparable in effect to the more celebratory Northampton Pageant of 1925. Up until the November of 1932 a Labour Mayor was in office. C J Scott had been chosen as the replacement for Alderman Slinn in late 1931.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Scott's efforts to mobilise middle class charitable concern for the unemployed were fully supported. When he went to

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- 75. Chronicle and Echo, 15th October 1932
 - 76. Chronicle and Echo, 24th October 1932
 - 77. Chronicle and Echo, 22nd and 24th October 1932
 - 78. Chronicle and Echo, 8th May 1933
 - 79. Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1933. In July 1933 the numbers of unemployed had been reduced from a Winter peak of 11537 to just over 6000
 - 80. Mercury and Herald, 13th November 1931

meet the NUWM Hunger Marchers in October 1932 he was accompanied by the Liberal ex-Mayor and carried with him offers of blankets, food and accommodation from local businessmen, the PAC and local voluntary charities.⁽⁸¹⁾ The Labour Mayor's Unemployed Social Service Centre was eventually launched in 1933, with new Conservative Mayor's blessing and the Chief Constable acting as the co-ordinator for numerous offers of financial and practical help from the Northampton employers.⁽⁸²⁾ The incoming Mayor, however, did not simply take over Labour initiatives. On taking office in November 1932 he announced his intention to set up a fund for the poor for the forthcoming Winter.⁽⁸³⁾ In November 1933 a Liberal Mayor repeated his predecessors example and set up his own Winter Distress Fund.⁽⁸⁴⁾ From 1932 to 1934 the Mayor's Winter Distress Funds became the centre of all charitable effort in Northampton.

Each and every fund raising event received ample publicity in the Chronicle and Echo. The newspaper's editor indeed set the tone for the way this charitable effort was used to re-enforce a sense of pride and citizenship. Editorial after editorial urged Northamptonians to give generously and quoted cases of donations given by "shop girls" as well as businessmen.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Even the unemployed themselves were not excluded as givers. The Northampton Unemployed Social Service Centre was reported as making toys as Christmas gifts for poor children.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Excitement and entertainment were introduced into the campaign when Cowper Barrons, the Chronicle and Echo's editor, persuaded Tom Walls, a popular cinema star and native of Northampton, to

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- 81. Chronicle and Echo, 24th October 1932
 - 82. Chronicle and Echo, 6th October 1932, 10th January and 10th November 1933
 - 83. Chronicle and Echo, 1st and 2nd December 1932
 - 84. Chronicle and Echo, 10th November 1934
 - 85. Chronicle and Echo, 1st December 1932 to 1st March 1934
 - 86. Chronicle and Echo, 10th November 1933

preview his latest films in Northampton on behalf of the fund.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Tom Walls' concern for his native town was quoted in evidence of the generosity of the successful. But the overall theme was one of community, not paternalism. In an editorial in early 1934, once again urging Northamptonians to give generously, Cowper Barrons announced "Northampton is often described as one big happy family. Let us all be brothers and sisters together."⁽⁸⁸⁾ The image of Northampton as a family, implicit in the paternalistic behaviour of its industrialists at the work place and in voluntary charity, thus received its most sustained support in a period when employers themselves were finding it more difficult to project that image. The Mayoral Fund united the traditional role of the Mayoralty with the resources of charitable and voluntary effort previously used by employers.

The Council did not just replace local government action with appeals to voluntarism. Despite the fact that government pressure and depression conditions were making it more difficult for them to use public funds to counter unemployment Councillors continued to resist nationally inspired cuts. The PAC, to which a number of Councillors were delegated,⁽⁸⁹⁾ exemplified the local posture. When civil servants visited the Northampton committee to point out that the level of payments they were making were unnecessarily high, members expressed scepticism.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Though they did not act in open defiance of government instructions, they proceeded very slowly and with obvious reluctance to implement reviews.⁽⁹¹⁾ Delegations from the NUWM were received sympathetically and where concessions could be made to their demands without

87. Chronicle and Echo, 18th February 1933 and 9th February 1934

88. Chronicle and Echo, 9th February 1934

89. Northampton Corporation Minutes 10th November 1932. The Northampton PAC was made up of 16 Councillors and 8 co-options

90. Chronicle and Echo, 14th February 1933 and Northampton Corporation Minutes for July 1933 note three written complaints from the Ministry and in June a special meeting of the PAC to meet an Inspector from the Ministry of Health

91. Northampton Corporation Minutes January 1933 to October 1934. The reviews confirmed full benefit to over half of the claimants, reduced payments in one third of all cases and disqualified around 11%

obvious contradiction of government instructions, this was done.⁽⁹²⁾ In areas where the Council had more control, such as in the policy on rent and rate arrears, economy took second place to generosity. A rapid increase in rent and rate arrears in the early 1930's did not lead to any radical revision of tenancy conditions.⁽⁹⁴⁾ The unemployed and the sick, especially those recovering from TB, continued to receive preferential treatment in the allocation of houses and flats.⁽⁹⁵⁾ Tenants who did fall into arrears were promised time to pay.⁽⁹⁶⁾ The local policy of municipal intervention in town planning and construction not only survived the loss of public works grants of the 1930's but came to full fruition in the period. Council house building continued so that by 1939 4670 dwellings had been constructed,^(table 5) well in excess of the figure aimed at in 1919. Slum clearance housing played a major part in the 1930's total of 2129 dwellings but so did unsubsidised provision for the waiting list. The removal of substandard properties had always, in any case, played a part in Northampton plans.⁽⁹⁷⁾ The importance of this programme to the Northampton economy cannot be denied. Whereas nationally public authorities contribution to the interwar housing stock accounted for only 28%⁽⁹⁸⁾ of all home building during the period, in Northampton 47% of all new housing was built by the Council. Without the contribution made by the Council levels of building in Northampton would have fallen well below the national average of one-third of all housing being of post 1918 origin.⁽⁹⁹⁾

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92. Mercury and Herald, 26th February 1932 and Chronicle and Echo, 14th February 1932
93. Chronicle and Echo, 22nd April 1932. It was estimated that 120 out of the 500 households on one estate were in arrears of rent and rates
94. M Bowley, Housing and the State 1919-1944 (1945), pp113-129. Northampton is classed as a Borough with "moderate" rent levels
95. Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1932. One in five TB patients in Northampton were accommodated in Council housing, as part of a deliberate policy of housing the sick and disabled
96. Chronicle and Echo, 22nd April 1932
97. Thomas Mawson and Sons, Proposals for Development, pp50-51
98. J Burnett, A Social History of Housing 1815-1970 (1980)m pp245-246
99. Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1938. Of a total housing stock of 28400 one third had been constructed post 1918, 9451 dwellings in all

It was not only in the field of housing that the Council made a major impact on the prosperity of the building trade. In 1929 with the approval of plans for a new Northampton Technical and Art School an era of public building began.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ In line with the proposals in the 1925 'Northampton Development Plan' the Corporation began to establish plans for a new covered market,⁽¹⁰¹⁾ a purpose built infant welfare centre⁽¹⁰²⁾ and its most ambitious scheme, a civic centre. The first stage of the centre consisting of a covered public baths, swimming pool and fire station was delayed during the national crisis in 1931.⁽¹⁰³⁾ But in 1932 it received Council approval,⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ and in 1936 the second stage, a new sessions court and police station, went ahead. Incidentally, but nonetheless importantly, the civic centre project re-enforced the image of Northampton as a progressive borough. The new covered swimming pool was trumpeted as a marvel of modern architecture in the local press. It was "cathedral like"⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ in proportions and an amenity of the most advanced kind. As Chairman of the Baths Committee, Labour's Bassett Lowke was given a great deal of the credit for bringing the scheme to fruition. His reputation for innovative flair and as a connoisseur of architectural style was thus carried over from the sphere of private patronage and charity to the municipality. Bassett Lowke helped to sustain the elected members' claim to special talent and as a Labour Councillor, he also re-enforced Labour's image.

THE LIMITS OF CONSENSUS

In 1937 the Liberal group was reduced to five members.^(table 4) From a position of parity with Labour it was summarily reduced to third place. The

100. Northampton Independent, 21st December 1929 and 7th February 1931

101. Thomas Mawson and Sons, Proposals for Development, p94

102. Mercury and Herald, 30th October 1936

103. Northampton Independent, 10th October 1931

104. Chronicle and Echo, 22nd September 1986 in an article commemorating fifty years of Mounts Baths

105. Chronicle and Echo, 3rd October 1936

Liberals' losses resulted in a Conservative majority for the first time since 1928. Among the Conservative Councillors there were now individuals who had served as Liberals for most of the interwar period. The Chowns, local builders and longstanding Liberals, deserted the Liberal cause declaring that the Conservative party was the "only defence against Socialism".⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Yet within the Conservative group the Chowns were advocates for municipal intervention to be extended. In particular they began to argue for the municipalisation of Northampton General Hospital.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ As the period drew towards its close, the differences between Councillors of different parties on the major issues of local government were becoming even less marked. Labour Councillors were still in a minority in advocating the creation of a 'direct labour' organisation to carry out Council building and the raising of the school leaving age.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ They acted as the advanced guard for the Council's public works programme.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ But the importance of public works housing and education were fully acknowledged by all parties.

The idea that Labour Councillors might be excluded from the town's administration was by this time unthinkable. As one Conservative Councillor admitted "no one can deny that many Socialist representatives have done good work for the town".⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Yet the retention of the party system on the Council still caused Liberal and Conservative members considerable unease. The same Conservative Councillor who had acknowledged the "good work" of Socialist colleagues ended his remarks by saying that the problem was that Labour Councillors really "could not give sufficient time" to public work. Labour representatives, it was implied, were working class and as such, had their limitations. The 1930's Labour group included fewer businessmen than it had

106. Northampton Herald, 8th November 1929 and 7th November 1930

107. Northampton Independent, 7th January 1938

108. Northampton Herald, 4th October 1929

109. Northampton Constituency Labour Party Collection of Municipal Election Leaflets

110. Chronicle and Echo, 31st October 1934

done in the 1920's but only a minority were manual workers.^(table 6) The greatest increase had been in the proportion of white collar councillors. The interpretation of meritocratic leadership as synonymous with business leadership had always been less strong in the Council than it had been in the voluntary sector and it had been significantly weakened with the advent of the Chronicle and Echo and its wider definition of Northampton spokesmen. The Mayoral Fund campaign had placed much greater stress on community and mass activity than on the leading role of businessmen. The Councillors of all parties had grown more confident that the municipality was an effective substitute for private benevolence. But the Labour party's position was still anomalous. Its very growth in representation seemed flatly to contradict the idea that Northampton was a united community choosing its representatives on the basis of their ability to serve the town.

Annual elections served as a perpetual reminder of the limits of the consensus. Even in the 1930's when the Labour group had become fully involved in the dignified element of Council life, the NCLP persisted in challenging incoming and outgoing Mayors at annual elections. For Conservatives and Liberals this was a practice which fully illustrated Labour's inability to place the common good above sectarian considerations.⁽¹¹¹⁾

The division between Conservative and Liberal was, of course, in itself a source of anxiety. Some Liberals made a virtue of their party label by denying it. They claimed only to have accepted the Liberal label on the understanding that they would be free to exercise their own judgement and not be subject to a party whip. Conservatives seized on the patriotic connotations of Conservatism and made much of the personal qualifications of their candidates.⁽¹¹²⁾ Both persisted in attacking Labour as sectarian and

111. Chronicle and Echo, 14th September 1934

112. Northampton Independent, 27th October 1923. Paid Advertisements placed by the NLA and NCUA

where possible, its candidates as inexperienced and lacking talent. The NCLP argued that Labour Councillors were outstanding servants of the Northampton interest, but they also claimed that they were the only representatives of the working class. From time to time the idea that Conservatives and Liberals were impartial upholders of the common good also came under attack.⁽¹¹³⁾

CONCLUSION

Northampton Borough Council was a very important source of support for Northampton patriotism. The Council's activities encouraged a sense of pride in the town's achievements and its social unity. The atmosphere in municipal politics was one of benevolence, progress and impartiality. Both traditional and modern aspects of local government contributed to the creation of this kind of public culture. In particular the grant aid and mandatory responsibilities placed with local authorities by central government stimulated an intervention in the local economy which continued even after much of the financial incentive for it had been withdrawn. The benefits this brought to both middle class and working class families provided the substance to the consensus. Depression conditions and social unrest were met with determined restatement of Northampton's unity and pragmatic efforts to restore prosperity. But the period nonetheless saw a weakening of the special claims of Northampton's business leaders to an unrivalled place as the governing class. Labour's claims to speak for the working class could be seen as having been enhanced, even though they were also being constantly questioned.

113. Northampton Constituency Labour Party Collection of Municipal Election leaflets

TABLE 4NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL : COMPOSITION AND CONTROL 1918-1939

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CONSERVATIVE</u>		<u>LIBERAL</u>		<u>LABOUR</u>		<u>INDEPENDENT</u>	<u>CONTROL</u>
	<u>CLLRS</u>	<u>ALD</u>	<u>CLLRS</u>	<u>ALD</u>	<u>CLLRS</u>	<u>ALD</u>	<u>CLLRS</u>	
1919	16	7	12	4	7	1	1	NP
1920	15	7	12	4	8	1	1	NP
1921	18	5	13	6	4	1	0	NP
1922	20	5	13	6	3	1	0	OP
1923	19	5	13	6	4	1	0	NP
1924	21	7	10	4	5	1	0	OP
1925	22	7	11	4	3	1	0	OP
1926	20	7	11	4	5	1	0	OP
1927	20	7	11	4	5	1	0	OP
1928	18	7	11	4	7	1	0	OP
1929	16	7	11	4	9	1	0	NP
*1930	16	5	10	4	10	3	0	NP
1931	16	5	10	4	10	3	0	NP
1932	17	6	10	3	9	3	0	NP
1933	16	6	10	3	10	3	0	NP
1934	16	6	10	3	10	3	0	NP
1935	16	6	10	3	10	3	0	NP
1936	17	6	10	3	9	3	0	NP
-1937	20	6	5	3	11	3	0	OP
1938	18	6	5	2	12	4	1	NP
1939	18	6	5	2	12	4	1	NP

CODE

NP = No party in overall control
 OP = One party with overall majority

* = Labour draws level with
 . Liberals

- = Labour becomes second
 largest group

NOTE:

There was no election held in 1931. The usual November one-third election was abandoned in favour of a full election in May 1932 on the new boundaries. The last annual one-third election was in November 1938. No elections were held in wartime.

SOURCE: Northampton Independent. Mercury and Herald. Chronicle and Echo

TABLE 5COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING COMPLETIONS IN NORTHAMPTON - 1919-1939

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NUMBER OF DWELLINGS COMPLETED</u>
1919	-
1920	-
1921	282
1922	224
1923	212
1924	150
1925	244
1926	368
1927	362
1928	229
1929	270
1930	-
1931	441
1932	-
1933	209
1934	286
1935	264
1936	372
1937	-
1938	338
1939	219
<u>TOTAL 1919-1939</u>	<u>4670</u>

SOURCE: Annual reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1918-1939. (Annual figures are not available for 1929-1932 or 1936 and 1937. The statistics given in these periods relate to two years taken together).

TABLE 6

OCCUPATIONS OF LABOUR COUNCILLORS ON
NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL - 1918-1939

<u>OCCUPATION</u>	<u>% OF LABOUR COUNCILLORS</u>
Manufacturer	23
Builder	3
Tradesman	6
Professional	16
White Collar	26
Manual worker	26

SOURCE: Northampton Year Books 1919 to 1939. As in table 3, women councillors have been allocated a status by reference to either their own occupation prior to marriage or that of their husband

CHAPTER 4

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT - THE SOURCE OF AN ALTERNATIVE VISION?

INTRODUCTION

As the last chapter indicated the Labour movement in Northampton was admitted, if only grudgingly, into the municipal meritocracy. But it was still seen as representing sectarian impulses and egalitarian ideas alien to the community ethos. In the following pages we will explore the ideology of the activists of the Labour Party, trade unions and trades council and find out how far the notion of class conflict and social equality really affected their thinking. An assessment will be made of the Labour movement's capacity to present an alternative vision of the world to that current in the business community and the Borough Council.

A SOCIALIST ELITE

In 1918, when the NCLP affiliated to the national Labour party its membership was drawn primarily from among the activists of the pre-war socialist societies.⁽¹⁾ The Northampton SDF, as already noted, had been influential in the town's major trade union for many years. The affiliation of the two NUBSO branches increased the influence of this group in the new party as the branch secretaries and paid officials of the union were all members of the SDF. Splits within the SDF over the war had, however, led to the group losing its dominance in the rest of the Labour movement. The ILP was now the most significant socialist society. During the latter years of the war it had campaigned vigorously around the issues of peace and reconstruction.

1. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p30

Capitalising on its pre-war capture of the executive of the Trades Council and the Co-operative Society, it had become particularly influential in the Co-operative Womens Guild and some of the smaller trade unions. The affiliation of the NCS and those unions to the Labour party, therefore, also gave the ILP a greater voice in the new party. There were some prominent converts from Liberalism, notably in the leadership of the NUR,⁽²⁾ but overall the party's active membership was Socialist, rather than labourist or reformist in character.

Members of the SDF who had converted to socialism in the 1890/1900's, were key figures in the leadership of the NCLP throughout the interwar years. Most of the party's early Councillors were drawn from this group,⁽³⁾ whose prior experience as local government candidates and representatives gave them a strong claim to such positions. The analysis of society made by SDF leaders nationally emphasised the inevitability of class war in a capitalist society and the importance of propagandising for socialism rather than reform. In the years immediately before the war and in the early 1920's many members of the SDF in Britain were converted to a syndicalist and then a Bolshevik perspective.⁽⁴⁾ But in Northampton, the influence of these more class orientated trends was confined to a few industrial activists. For most local socialists "class war" was not a means of achieving capitalism's downfall, but a sign of the instability and imperfection of the system. Socialism would be achieved by a combination of education and example.

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2. Northampton Daily Echo, 12th December 1918 and Northampton Independent, 8th November 1919
 3. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, pp54-62. Of the seven Labour Councillors elected in 1918, five had an SDF background
 4. S Pierson, British Socialists (1979), pp261-291

Chief among the means of exemplifying the efficacy of socialism was the "socialist experiment". Hyndman's argument that the "gropings" toward socialism of the public authorities was "reducing the distance we have to traverse before we attain the full stage of the co-operative commonwealth",⁽⁵⁾ was clearly formative in the views and conduct of the SDF's two most outstanding Northampton leaders. Alfred Slinn, the leader of the Labour group until 1931, regarded his task as one of demonstrating the efficiency of a public body in providing housing, as against private enterprise. His public statements constantly echoed the classic SDF division between "amelioration" or reform and socialist experiments of this kind.⁽⁶⁾ In a locally published pamphlet in 1929, C J Scott, Labour's first Mayor, argued that so far from self-interest being a bar to the "properly classes" acceptance of socialism, the philanthropic donations of many businessmen to public bodies demonstrated a growing trust in this means of administering services. The nationalisation of industry flowed logically from this point and all that was necessary for full acceptance of the socialist system was "a thorough explanation of its principles".⁽⁷⁾ Like most of their contemporaries, whether from the SDF or ILP tradition, Scott and Slinn saw the coming of Socialism in terms of an intellectual and moral *conversion of* the whole community. Indeed, like the Fabians, they often expressed an expectation that the educated would be amongst the first to recognise the rationality of the project.

The activists of this pre-war generation saw themselves as an elite. The language of popular socialism, before the emergence of syndicalism, was full of images of socialists as saviours of a degraded class.⁽⁸⁾ If the syndicalist

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5. S Pierson, *British Socialists*, pp81-82
 6. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, p63
 7. C J Scott, Why You Should be a Socialist and Help Bring About a Social Democratic System of Society in the Near Future (Northampton 1929) p10
 8. R Samuel, *The Vision Splendid in New Socialist* May 1985, p28

and Bolshevik movements offered any new dimension to the Northampton activists' view of their role it was the concepts of leadership, discipline and organisation.⁽⁹⁾ It was incumbent upon the elite to demonstrate their

personal ability by performing their task with rigour and exactitude.

The painstaking collection of statistics of housing need in the town, carried out by Northampton socialists in the latter years of the war, demonstrate that this was very much a feature of their thinking.

Alfred Slinn's performance at a Board of Guardians conference on unemployment in the early 1920's reflects how the dichotomy between reform within the system and propaganda for socialism was overcome in a belief framework which placed a high value on individual leadership. Slinn began his contribution with a thorough exposition of the inevitability of unemployment under capitalism and then went on to describe in detail the numerous measures which could be undertaken "within the present system",⁽¹⁰⁾ for the relief of the problem. As a leader as well as a teacher he had to demonstrate his capacity for reform initiatives. There were a number of businessmen amongst the pre-war generation of activists as the party's town council membership indicates. They may have shared therefore in the entrepreneur culture of their non-Socialist counterparts in Northampton. There was in any case a considerable overlap between the business community's belief in the industrialist as a social leader and the socialists' self-justification. As Scott's pamphlet pointed out, the managers and administrators necessary for socialised industry would inevitably be drawn from amongst the educated, able and talented. These men would be found, he argued, amongst the present owners and managers of industry and from those who had demonstrated their administrative skills in membership of town councils and the executives of Co-operative Societies.⁽¹¹⁾

9. R Samuel, Enter the Proletarian Giant in New Socialist July/August 1985 pp24-27

10. Northampton Herald, 13th October 1922

11. C J Scott, Why You Should be a Socialist, p10

Even among those socialists who were involved in industrial trade unionism neither egalitarianism nor workerism was very well developed. James Gribble, the most prominent SDF trade unionist, dabbled with syndicalism in the militant atmosphere of 1912 to 1914. Yet he was highly critical of the agitation for works committees amongst NUBSO members in the 1918-1919 period.⁽¹²⁾ He denounced the idea as a recipe for employer control of a naive and easily intimidated workforce. Len Smith, a younger trade union official and also an SDF member, was a temporary convert to the idea of workers determining their own destiny as a group.⁽¹³⁾ But by the 1930's when NUBSO came close to being involved in mass strike action, he was as determined as James Gribble had been to quash notions of rank and file committees. Using the language of syndicalism, Smith argued that a strike led from below would be like "an army without a General".⁽¹⁴⁾ The brief currency of workers control theories in the ILP nationally, which coincided with the growth of Northampton ILP, seems to have had little impact on the attitudes and beliefs of socialists in local industry. The strength of the SDF in the town's major trade union precluded much ILP influence, and the weakness of trade union organisations in other industries left little room for development elsewhere.⁽¹⁵⁾ The idea of class conflict as a positive force for change, or class antagonism as something to be encouraged, thus never formed a coherent part of Northampton Socialists' ideology. It was

12. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p402

13. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p402

14. Chronicle and Echo, 21st February 1933

15. Minutes of Northampton Trades Council 1915-1948, Annual Reports 1923-1945 and Cash Book 1915-1940. The two Northampton NUBSO branches accounted for 58% of trades council membership in 1915 and 70% in 1937. Only the NUR and NUBSO had majority memberships in their industry. The Northampton AEU was affiliated on a membership representing 20% of those involved in the industry in 1937

occasionally and spasmodically vented in anger or in periods of high optimism. So that, for example, both Len Smith and James Gribble gained a reputation for being "revolutionaries" on the basis of their class hostility to employers on the town council and for their tendency to challenge industrialists' competence in running local industry during periods of high unemployment.⁽¹⁶⁾

The only marked difference in philosophy between ILP and SDF activists of the pre-war generation was the place of religion in their view of the world and to some extent their willingness to accommodate Liberalism. Theoretically at least Northampton SDF continued the secularist message of Bradlaugh. Yet non-conformism was a common influence on the formation of socialist ideas in both groups. Congregationalism, as well as secularism, had been an important influence on a number of SDF activists. C J Scott had been converted to socialism by the "debates on the social questions"⁽¹⁷⁾ of the day in his chapel. William Barratt and his brothers were regular attenders and members of the choir at a Congregational chapel throughout their earlier years as SDF activists.⁽¹⁸⁾ The Northampton SDF branch had acted as host to Reverend Kirtlan when he visited Northampton to give a talk on Socialism for Christians in 1905 and had published a pamphlet giving a verbatim account of it.⁽¹⁹⁾ C J Scott, an avowed secularist, made a second marriage to a Sunday School teacher in the 1920's⁽²⁰⁾ and Alfred Slinn was often invited to give talks to the "Mens Own" movement connected with the Northampton non-conformist chapels.⁽²¹⁾ Thus religious belief played a more central role in the philosophy of older ILP members: Albert Burrows and Will Rogers were both lay

16. Northampton Independent, 26th February and 23rd April 1921 and Northampton Herald, 4th November 1921
17. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p39
18. Northampton Pioneer, September 1908
19. ----- Socialism for Christians. A Lecture delivered by Rev EJB Kirtlan at Northampton (Northampton 1906)
20. Mercury and Herald, 13th November 1931
21. Minutes of Northampton Men's Own, Doddridge Chapel 1929-1940 and Northampton Daily Echo, 12th September 1924

preachers,⁽²²⁾ but it by no means divided them from their SDF contemporaries. Attitudes to Liberalism were similarly rather a matter of degree than complete division, SDF Councillors had worked closely with the Liberal group on the Borough Council between 1910 and 1918, whilst maintaining their electoral independence. The founding principle for the ILP's existence in Britain had been to establish a Labour Party electorally independent from the Liberals.⁽²³⁾ But in Northampton, the war had brought greater co-operation with Liberalism. Service on Recruiting committees and Welfare committees for servicemen and civilians had actually brought ILP leaders, like F O Roberts,⁽²⁴⁾ into the town's government for the first time.

In effect although the two socialist societies had different intellectual origins, they shared a very similar set of beliefs and experiences. The expectation of a cataclysmic downfall of capitalism and the emphasis on the internal contradictions of the system in SDF philosophy were muted by their didactic approach and elitism. The ILP's gradualism and belief in the organic unity of society produced much the same result in terms of a reliance on individual qualities of leadership and an eagerness to engage in reform activities and socialist experiments. Both groups saw themselves as being instrumental in modernising their community and moving it forward from the inherently irrational economics of competition and private enterprise towards a more scientific, co-operative system. They expected the municipality to play a central part in that project. Only a few, principally those with a trade union background, were in any way imbued with a desire to mobilise class antagonism in support of their vision.

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- 22. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, pp48-49. Albert Burrows was the leader of Northampton Labour group after the death of Alfred Slinn. Will Rogers was President of the Northampton Co-operative Society from 1910 to post 1945
 - 23. S Pierson, British Socialists, pp37-39
 - 24. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p47. F O Roberts, a founder member of Northampton ILP, Secretary of the Northampton Typographical Association and of the Trades Council until 1918

CLASS WAR AND MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM

The ILP's recruitment of a more youthful membership during and immediately after the war had led to the Northampton Labour movement being taken over by forces which favoured "class war at home and pacifism abroad"⁽²⁵⁾ according to Charles McCurdy, Northampton's Liberal MP. The General Management Committee's choice of parliamentary candidates tended to reinforce the image of the party put forward by its opponents. In 1918, it voted by 26 votes to 14 to reject the candidacy of T F Richards, the General President of NUBSO and select W R Halls, an NUR official and active ILP member, as the parliamentary candidate. As Richards indignantly declared, the party delegates were interested in the answer to only one question: "are you pro-war or pro-pacifist?"⁽²⁶⁾ But although Richards was a classic 'labourist' trade unionist,⁽²⁷⁾ in fact his rejection did not indicate any growth in class orientated politics in the constituency. The new memberships' dominance in party affairs rather increased the salience of foreign policy issues and internationalism. The influence of the 'free churches' and Charles McCurdy's prominent role in the foundation of the LNU⁽²⁸⁾ ensured that the Northampton chapels and Liberal activists of the older generation played a major part in popularising the League of Nations idea.⁽²⁹⁾ But the ILP's stance on the League of Nations, opposition to the Wars of Intervention, as well as the Liberals acceptance of a national coalition with Conservatism precipitated many young men and women from a Liberal Radical tradition into the Northampton Labour Party.⁽³⁰⁾ The new recruits quickly embraced the jargon of socialism and talked of the need for the 'capital levy' and 'workers control',⁽³¹⁾ but

25. Northampton Daily Echo, 7th December 1918

26. NUBSO Monthly Reports, July 1918

27. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp336-337

28. Northampton Independent, 1st December 1923

29. D S Birn, The League of Nations Union 1918-1945 (1981), p15

30. Northampton Daily Echo, 5th December 1918

31. NCLP Collection of Parliamentary Election Leaflets

they displayed their real priorities in 1928 once again, when they were faced with a choice between two candidates with the left wing credentials. In both 1918 and 1920 the NCLP's failure to select NUBSO candidates could be seen as based on a preference for left wing or socialist candidates. In 1928, however, NUBSO's nominee was Len Smith, the well known industrial militant. The NCLP rejected him in favour of Cecil L'Estrange Malone who had been a Liberal MP in the co-alition government. He had defected to the Communist party in protest at the Government's involvement in the Wars of Intervention.⁽³²⁾

This clear demonstration of a preference for a candidate with a radical line on foreign policy following in the wake of the General Strike and Trade Disputes Act, further indicates the importance of foreign policy issues among these activists.

The disposition of the newer recruits to ignore industrial questions did not, however, prevent them from being absorbed into the mainstream of Labour movement life. Like the older generation they gave a high priority to municipal politics. The ILP had been most successful in recruiting white collar workers and women into the new Labour party. Its recruitment drives in the latter part of the war had given the NCLP an unusually large individual membership and one which was predominantly female.⁽³³⁾ In terms of office holding and policy making the party was very biased towards long term members and lower middle class occupations. The executive of the Constituency party in the 1930's was made up of a very small group indeed. Only thirty five individuals served on this sixteen place body in eight years. Discounting the eight who served for one year, this leaves a core of twenty seven activists. At least twelve of this group were people who, by occupation or marriage, could be defined as above manual worker status.⁽³⁴⁾ Labour Councillors and Aldermen

32. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p51

33. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p32. In 1930, at its peak, membership of the NCLP included 1463 women and 1195 men.

34. NCLP Minutes 1932-1939

tended to be drawn from the lower middle class, with the proportion of white collar occupations among them increasing as the period progressed, as mentioned earlier. Their involvement and influence in the running of the party itself was very considerable. Of the 18 Councillors who represented Labour between 1932-1939, eight were also members of the Party's Executive.⁽³⁵⁾ The Labour party leader, Alderman Burrows was the party's Financial Secretary from 1919 to 1939.⁽³⁶⁾ The presence of so many councillors in the executive and in the General Management Committee as a whole ensured that what political debate did take place, was often in the context of council experience.⁽³⁷⁾

Women activists were marginally under-represented at the Management Committee level in the party and even more under-represented in executive positions, but by comparison with trade union and Trade Council opportunities for access to power the party offered them a great deal more. Only one out of the five delegates from the NUBSO No 2 branch in 1932 was a woman,⁽³⁸⁾ though the branch consisted largely of female operatives. The Trades Council's representation was similarly male dominated. It was through the Womens Section and Ward branches that women were able to achieve some say and some recognition in policy making. Significantly although only four women were selected as Council candidates between 1919-1939 and only four executive places fell to women delegates between 1932-1939, they were far better represented in the contest for co-opted places on the Borough Council and PAC. In 1932, for example, seven out of eight Labour party nominations for these positions were for women members.⁽³⁹⁾ Given the importance of housing and public health

35. NCLP Minutes 1932-1939

36. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p48

37. NCLP Minutes 1932-1939

38. NCLP Minutes January to December 1932

39. NCLP Minutes January to December 1932

issues in the organisations through which the ILP had recruited them, it is not surprising that women activists from the Womens Co-operative Guild, for example, were staunch supporters of municipal reform.⁽⁴⁰⁾ For those who had come into the Labour Movement through the womens suffrage groups and white collar trade unionism, the status they were accorded encouraged a preoccupation with municipal affairs.⁽⁴¹⁾

Within the trade unions and the Trade Council there were also factors at work which disposed Labour movement activists to place growing reliance on municipal activity and to continue to see themselves as an elite acting on behalf of a passive working class. NUBSO, one of only two unions with a mass membership in Northampton, was in industrial retreat from 1920 onwards. But the gains of the pre-war years and wartime state regulation of industry had left behind a residue of advantages for trade union officials. The manufacturers' experience of pre-war militancy had led them to accept and even encourage a virtual "closed shop"⁽⁴²⁾ in local shoe factories. After the long battle against piecework in Northampton a complex pattern of arbitration procedures had been constructed to settle piecework rates and disputes. Thus local trade union officials were given a great deal of leverage. The failed agitation for works committees, meant that there was no shop steward development in the shoe industry.⁽⁴³⁾ Officials were in a position of authority both vis a vis their membership and the manufacturers. In the 1920's paid officials like Len Smith and James Gribble often demonstrated a militancy that suggested that they were courting approval from a membership disgruntled with short time working and declining wage levels. But this was largely a reflex action based

40. Life as We Have Known It (1977), edited by M Llewelyn Davies, pXIV

41. Annual Report of Northampton Trades Council for 1937. Miss Whitehurst, President of Northampton Trades Council in 1922, describes her progress from an interest in women's suffrage to trade unionism and serving on Borough Council committees in this report

42. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp448-451

43. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p401

on their pre-war ability to mobilise 'lightening' strikes in response to employer offensives. By the late 1920's they, and the national leadership of the union, were convinced that the majority of the membership was passive and unlikely to respond to calls for action.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Nonetheless, they were dependent on the local vote of the union membership for their official positions. It was not until the 1930's that the National Executive began to appoint paid officials directly.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Northampton NUBSO officials were in a position which made their personal popularity and reputation for winning individual cases in piecework disputes, very important to their livelihood. At the same time they could not rely on the membership to back them up. Their successes were their own, based on their professionalism and the authority accorded to them by the manufacturers.

Industrial disputes in 1933 and 1934 forced a change in attitude and placed an emphasis on mass membership action. But, by this time, Union officers had begun to be appointed by the NEC of NUBSO and this, together with the growing opportunities for nationally negotiated improvements in wages and conditions after 1935,⁽⁴⁶⁾ reinforced the 'professional' attitudes of trade union leaders in Northampton after 1934.

For most of the period active trade unionists in Northampton shoe industry were involved in justifying their role to the membership not by success, but by the limitation of failure. Their position was very similar to that of the manufacturers with whom they bargained. Like them, they could point to instances in which their personal talent and commitment had produced beneficial results but only in the context of an industry where employment was insecure and wage levels were not advancing.⁽⁴⁷⁾ In the early years

44. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp541-542
 45. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p517
 46. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p524
 47. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p506

of depression trade unionists found in the Labour party's advocacy of 'Trade with Russia', a slogan which offered the opportunity to place blame on the manufacturers and at the same time illustrate the way forward for the industry. It was, they argued, lack of imagination and drive in opening up new export markets which was bringing unemployment to Northampton's shoe workers.⁽⁴⁸⁾ But the NBSMA and the Chamber of Commerce were quick to seek out export opportunities and were able to counter this argument by their own willingness to send trade deputations to Russia and elsewhere. By the late 1920's both locally and at national level, explanations for the shoe industry's failure to thrive on both sides of the industry, scapegoated common targets. Both sides were openly critical of the role of governments and financiers in refusing to help the export drive. Foreign competitors like Bata were attacked vociferously by manufacturers and trade union leaders alike.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Forced back to a position of trying to mitigate the effects of depression on their members, union officials were also obliged to concede manufacturer goodwill as a condition of reaping some credit for their successes. Short time working, the only alternative to large scale unemployment, was conceded at the instigation of Northampton shoe trade union officials.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Without it, as they were quick to point out, the operatives would have been suffering far worse levels of unemployment.⁽⁵¹⁾ But by the same token they had to agree that Northampton shoe manufacturers were "fair",⁽⁵²⁾ especially by comparison with industrialists in other centres of the trade.

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- 48. Northampton Mercury, 25th February 1921 and Northampton Independent, 26th February 1921
 - 49. Northampton Independent, 10th October and 5th and 12th December 1931, also Shoe and Leather News, 14th January 1932
 - 50. Northampton Herald, 1st October 1920
 - 51. Northampton Mercury, 7th January 1921
 - 52. Northampton Mercury, 7th January 1921, Shoe and Leather News, 7th July 1927 and 28th November 1929 and Northampton Independent, 1st February 1930

In the Trades Council the emphasis on amelioration was especially pronounced and trade union activists were even more prone to view their role as that of a pressure group for reducing the impact of unemployment in Northampton. Though NUBSO representatives, who were prominent in the Trades Council, had a recognised place in industrial bargaining this was not true of the majority of delegates. With one exception, that of the NUR, the rest of NTC delegates were drawn from trade unions with a weak industrial base or from a white collar background. The occasional trade union recruiting drive⁽⁵³⁾ led by the Trades Council only emphasised this inadequacy. In the main the Trades Council was a forum in which politically committed trade unionists could exert influence within the Labour party and on the Borough Council. Individual delegates had the opportunity to serve as co-opted members on the Council and on the PAC. The organisation became an important means of supporting Labour Councillors efforts to maintain a high level of public works and Council house building. Delegations to the Borough Council about both issues were a regular feature of Trades Council activity. As the unemployment problem reached acute proportions in the early 1930's, the Trades Council set up a number of sub-committees,⁽⁵⁴⁾ to investigate and advocate specific projects suitable for public works schemes. Thus, like their equivalents in the Labour party and in NUBSO, the Trades Councils delegates were inclined to regard themselves as an elite with a function which required persuasive powers rather than the ability to mobilise the mass. Their claims to be listened to rested on the organised working class group they represented, but in putting forward their case they often used a language which implied a community or local consciousness. They argued that Northampton had a first class record on housing matters and appealed for a continuation of that tradition.⁽⁵⁵⁾

53. Minutes of Northampton Trades Council 1928-1930

54. Minutes of Northampton Trades Council 1931 to 1935 and Annual Reports 1931 to 1937

55. Chronicle and Echo, 7th February 1933

Nonetheless, like the Labour party, the Trades Council was sometimes accused of harbouring revolutionaries and fostering class war. In the early 1920's both the Trades Council and the NCS came under attack and efforts were made to divorce these Labour movement organisations from the Labour party. In the case of the Co-operative Society, the ILP-dominated executive and education committee quickly gave way when threatened with a ballot of the membership on the question of Labour party affiliation.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The Class Teachers Union's move to have the Trades Council disaffiliate from the "Socialist" party was less successful.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The stance taken in justification of continued affiliation indicated that the Trades Council socialists were slightly more confident of their constitutional position than their compatriots in the NCS. They argued that the affiliation was in line with the Trades Council's long held policy of 'direct labour' representation and did not necessarily imply a commitment to socialism. Later the Trades Council came under less direct criticism. In 1926, for example, its secretary was publically accused of being a member of the Communist party. The charge arose from a public meeting sponsored by the Trades Council at which a locked-out miner had given a speech. The subsequent appearance of the speaker in the local magistrates court, charged with incitement to riot, was the occasion for the allegation.⁽⁵⁸⁾ In reality the attempt to label the NTC as a Communist front had more to do with the establishments perceptions of the General Strike than the disposition of opinion in the town's Labour movement. Tommy Pendred, Trades Council secretary, was in fact a close associate of Len Smith and a member of the same Labour party branch.⁽⁵⁹⁾ It was only in early 1928 that the Communist party showed any real signs of activity in

56. Minutes of Northampton Co-operative Society Board of Management and Reports of Quarterly General Meetings July to December 1920

57. Northampton Mercury, 19th November 1920

58. Northampton Daily Echo, 9th October 1926

59. Northampton Daily Echo, 3rd March 1930

Northampton. The National Minority Movement had begun to gain a little support in NUBSO in 1927, principally in the London branches of the union. In May 1928 the Movement's journal recorded the formation of a Northampton branch.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The demands which the group put forward were designed to recruit activists discontented with the Unions policy of relying on paid officials and the process of arbitration. Humphrey Attewell, the lone voice for Communism in Northampton since the early 1920's,⁽⁶¹⁾ was nominated as one of the NMM slate of candidates for the national office in the Union.⁽⁶²⁾ But the Movement had little real support. In late 1929, a Midland Bureau of the NMM was set up by the National Executive in an attempt to counter the "apparent breakdown of NMM organisation in the district".⁽⁶³⁾ Only a month later Humphrey Attewell was complaining that he was being expected to fulfil "every local task",⁽⁶⁴⁾ including the distribution of the Railway workers bulletin. Northampton's two delegates to the Bureaux were irregular attenders throughout 1930 and contact seems to have been mostly by letter. In February 1931 even that contact broke down and the Bureaux received no reply to its notes requesting information on Northampton activity on the unemployment issue.⁽⁶⁵⁾

The outbreak of militant and apparently class conscious protest, which was a feature of the 1932 to 1934 period, was not based on any sustained Communist activism in the town. But Labour's industrial militants and the ILP were becoming discontented. In 1930 Len Smith and Tommy Fendred were among four Labour party activists expelled for refusing to accept the General Management

60. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p469

61. Northampton Mercury, 22nd August 1924

62. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p469

63. National Minority Movement Midland Bureaux Minutes, 28th September 1929

64. NMM Midland Bureaux Minutes, 27th October 1929

65. NMM Midland Bureaux Minutes 23rd November 1929 to 7th February 1931

committees choice of municipal candidate in North Ward.⁽⁶⁶⁾ In 1931 a public meeting was called by the Northampton ILP to protest against the Labour group's rumoured acceptance of a pact to defer the municipal elections till 1933.⁽⁶⁷⁾ For some Labour party activists the growing level of unemployment in the town seems to have inspired a reaction against the party's local leadership. The fall of the 1929 to 1931 Labour Government and the decision of the ILP nationally to withdraw from the Labour party then precipitated them into agitation around the unemployment issue.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The older activists, despite their sense of alienation from the Labour party, tended to remain within it. Tommy Pendred, for example, fought his case for re-instatement as did Len Smith.⁽⁶⁹⁾ One or two of the new Labour Councillors elected in the 1930's were to the forefront in demanding a more aggressive approach to Borough Council work.⁽⁷⁰⁾ But some younger members left the Labour party and became key figures in the disaffiliated ILP,⁽⁷¹⁾ the newly active Communist party and Northampton Branch of NUWM.

The excitement and enthusiasm generated by the ILP and the Communist party in their public demonstrations in 1932 and 1933, heckling of representatives of the establishment, NUWM deputations to the PAC and the Hunger Marches caused a sense of anxiety in middle class circles. It brought into brief activity young people never before associated with the Labour movement. But even for those most heavily involved it was not an experience which produced any long lasting rejection of the values and behaviour patterns more well

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66. Northampton Daily Echo, 1st and 3rd March 1930. The dispute was officially about party rules. North Ward officers claimed that the branch was entitled to consultation about the choice of Municipal candidate for their Ward. But it is possible that the GMC's imposition of a candidate was only resented because the branch wanted a more left wing candidate
67. Chronicle and Echo, 2nd December 1931
68. NCLP Minutes, 12th October 1932
69. Northampton Daily Echo, 3rd March 1930
70. Northampton Herald, 8th November 1929, Chronicle and Echo, 2nd December 1931 and 21st October 1933. Councillor Weston, elected for Kingsthorpe in 1929, publically opposed deferring the municipal elections in 1931 and continued as a critic within the Labour group
71. Roger and Richard Slinn, Alfred Slinn's sons, were leading members of the Northampton ILP

established amongst socialist activists. The conduct of two of the most prominent NUWM members of these years, J A Pursaill and D Mitchell, illustrates the superficiality of Communist and ILP influence. Pursaill left the Labour party in 1931 in protest at the Labour group's support for a municipal pact.⁽⁷²⁾ In 1932 he returned to the Labour party.⁽⁷³⁾ Despite a very public row with the Trades Council over the cancellation of the 1933 May Day procession, which he saw as a ruse to prevent the NUWM taking part,⁽⁷⁴⁾ he was a Labour candidate in the municipal elections that November and was opposed by an ILP candidate.⁽⁷⁵⁾ By 1935 Pursaill was again in public disagreement with the Labour party but this time because of his support for Lord Nuffield's policy of 'co-operation' in industry. Refused a place on the municipal panel in consequence of this, he resigned and stood as a Liberal candidate making much play of his rejection of nationalisation.⁽⁷⁶⁾ The instability of Pursaill's politics was demonstrated again in 1938 when he stood as a Ratepayer candidate in the local elections.⁽⁷⁷⁾ His associate in the NUWM, D Mitchell, abandoned his Communist party membership⁽⁷⁸⁾ in 1934 and was thereafter an active Labour party member and opponent of Communism.⁽⁷⁹⁾ Mitchell's career was more representative than Pursaill's of the drift which occurred amongst activists who had been mobilised around the unemployment issue. While the Northampton ILP's most committed members remained outside the Labour party until 1937,⁽⁸⁰⁾ both they and Communist activists soon recognised that agitation was a less successful method of work than the pressure group style practised by the Trades Council for example.

73. NCLP Minutes, April 1932

74. NCLP Minutes, May 1933

75. Chronicle and Echo, 9th November 1935

76. Chronicle and Echo, 31st October and 1st November 1935

77. NCLP Minutes, December 1938

78. NCLP Minutes, July 1934

79. NCLP Minutes, April 1936

80. NCLP Minutes, June 1937 and Chronicle and Echo 12th January 1938

Individualists, like Pursaill, left the Labour movement altogether but many of his contemporaries simply relinquished their egalitarian expectations. They, like earlier activists began to see themselves as a politically conscious elite thwarted by the "apathy"⁽⁸¹⁾ of the masses.

Both the Labour party and the Trades Council offered tempting alternatives to the radical or revolutionary sects. The conciliatory stance taken by both Liberals and Conservatives on the Borough Council meant that both organisations were able to demonstrate that their efforts on behalf of the unemployed yielded practical results. A joint Labour party and Trades Council meeting organised to protest against the new Unemployment regulations implemented in January 1935 brought together over 1000 people,⁽⁸²⁾ the largest single demonstration that the town had seen for years. The Governments' retreat from confrontation in the face of the widespread protest therefore brought credit to the 'official' Labour Movement in Northampton. In 1936 the Jarrow marchers and a group of unemployed blind marched through the town.⁽⁸³⁾ Despite the NEC of the Labour party's instructions to withhold local co-operation, the NCLP was able to capitalise on the precedents set by the Borough Council's reception of the earlier Hunger marchers. The Labour group gathered together a deputation to the Mayor, involving both Liberals and Conservatives, and successfully pressed for an official reception.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Many of the NCLP's most active members were involved in canvassing for signatures for the "Peace Ballot" of 1935.⁽⁸⁵⁾ The party also provided

81. Northampton Trades Council Annual Report for 1937 in which the President, W T Jackson, a left activist in 1933, referred to workers' apathy

82. Chronicle and Echo, 4th February 1936

83. Chronicle and Echo, 19th and 30th October 1936

84. NCLP Minutes, October 1936

85. NCLP Minutes July and September 1934 refer to the appointment of a Labour party delegate to the organising committee for the Peace Ballot. Kingsley Ward Labour Party Minutes 26th June 1934 includes a list of 70 volunteers from the Ward

speakers to the LNU branches in Northampton.⁽⁸⁶⁾ There was a revival of interest in the peace issue in the town's chapels and the LNU itself. The absence of Liberal candidate in the General Elections 1931 and 1935, the long term decline of the Liberal party and the Labour party's willingness to offer theoretical explanations of the threat of war⁽⁸⁷⁾ enabled it to recruit once again among young Christian Radicals. The party locally like the national party, was confused about its response to Italian aggression against Abyssinia.⁽⁸⁸⁾ But the events leading up to the General Election of 1935 in Northampton may have enhanced the party's pacifist and radical image as well as demonstrating its confusion. Cecil L'Estrange Malone, resigned as the Labour candidate in the weeks running up to the election on the grounds that he could not support a policy of sanctions.⁽⁸⁹⁾ His decision to conduct a speaking tour in Northampton during the election campaign was a source of embarrassment to the local party.⁽⁹⁰⁾ It nonetheless ensured that international issues were kept well to the front in the election campaign. Reginald Paget was chosen as the candidate by NCLP's executive and they were little interested in his views on foreign or, for that matter, home affairs. They were concerned to obtain a candidate who could make a substantial contribution to election expenses, though their localist and elitist preoccupations led to them specifically seeking a well-known, local person.⁽⁹¹⁾ Indeed, it was only because William Barratt, the Northampton shoe manufacturer, declined the position that the executive offered it to Reginald Paget.⁽⁹²⁾ The son of a County squire, a barrister and a recent, well publicised convert to socialism, Paget came closest to their requirements.⁽⁹³⁾ Paget's intellectual conversion to Marxism placed

86. Chronicle and Echo, 19th November 1936

87. D S Birn, The League of Nations Union 1918-1945 (1981), p25

88. NCLP Minutes May 1935

89. Northampton Independent, 18th September 1935

90. Chronicle and Echo, 11th November 1935

91. NCLP Minutes October 1935

92. NCLP Minutes October 1935

93. Mercury and Herald, 25th October 1935. Reginald Paget was the son of Major Guy Paget who had been an Independent Conservative MP (1922-1923) He was a Cambridge Law graduate and claimed to have been converted to Socialism whilst studying "the science of government" during his recovery from a hunting accident in 1929

him on the very left of the Labour party. His denunciations of the "present economic system"⁽⁹⁴⁾ and his advocacy, like Sir Stafford Cripps, of workers sabotage rather than sanctions⁽⁹⁵⁾ appealed strongly to young activists. He also came very close to winning the election.⁽⁹⁶⁾

Almost by accident the Labour party in Northampton recaptured the political initiative on the left and as a consequence brought into its membership both those who had been politicised by the unemployment and industrial agitation of 1932-1934 and many whose chief concern was peace. As the Agent recorded in 1937, there were successful recruitment drives in 1936 and 1937 and a far higher than usual rate of participation by the new members.⁽⁹⁷⁾ A new branch of the Labour League of Youth was founded in Northampton in 1936⁽⁹⁸⁾ and in 1937 a branch of the Left Book Club was meeting on the party's premises and functioning as an adjunct of the party.⁽⁹⁹⁾

The party's internal life was changed by the activist recruitment post 1935. The overwhelming concentration on municipal affairs in General Management Committee debates was replaced by a more nationally and internationally orientated discussion.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ It is debatable, however, if the preoccupations of these years really represented a change in values from those of the majority of the inter-war period. As we have already noted the activists of the 1920's had seen themselves as an elite, engaged in a project designed to demonstrate the superior efficiency of a socialist economic system. Their meritocratic vision had implied only a limited sense of class hostility toward the local establishment, and both their industrial and municipal experience had made

94. Mercury and Herald, 25th October 1935

95. NCLP Minutes March 1938

96. Reginald Paget secured 23938 votes as against Manningham Buller's 25438

97. NCLP Minutes July 1937

98. NCLP Minutes February 1936

99. NCLP Minutes January and September 1937

100. NCLP Minutes 1931 to 1939

this an even less salient element in their ideology. Through the Borough Council many of the most influential activists had been involved in the projection of an image of Northampton as a united community under siege by outsiders. For many years the town's major trade union had co-operated with local shoe manufacturers in offering a parallel image in the shoe industry. Since 1931, when the Labour Governments fall had been explained in terms of a "Bankers ramp",⁽¹⁰¹⁾ there had been a growing conviction amongst Labour activists that financiers rather than industrialists were the chief obstacle to socialism in Britain. For Northampton socialists this theory had the advantage of corresponding to the shared views of industrialists and trade unionists about Stock Exchange takeovers of local shoe firms and the failure of the banks to support export efforts. It also echoed the persistent complaint of Northampton Councillors that governments were interfering in local affairs and undermining constructive municipal activity.

By 1937, however, Reginald Paget was interpreting the "Bankers ramp" theory in terms of a fundamental division in socialist thought and offering an analysis which implied class conflict. Criticising the Labour party's 'Immediate programme', he said:

My difference with the draftsmen of the new policy goes to the very root of socialist thought. I believe with Marx that the ruling class will fight for their privileges. The sponsors of the new policy believe with Robert Owen that capital will co-operate in its own liquidation .⁽¹⁰²⁾

101. NCLP Minutes September 1931 and attached press cutting

102. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p73

Yet although Paget's argument divided the General Management Committee into two groups on the theory of whether or not a Parliamentary majority was a sufficient precondition for socialism, it did not directly challenge the party's co-operative relationship with local industrialists or their elitist assumptions. Paget, like most left wing intellectuals of these years, saw the solution to this problem not in the nationalisation of industry, but in the control of the major banks and finance houses. Indeed, he specifically rejected state ownership of the means of production and did so in a way which confirmed beliefs about the crucial role of the owners and managers of industry:

Any attempt to take over the factory system without the co-operation of the present management or, worse still, in the face of their active sabotage, would entice the breakdown of the productive organisation of the country.⁽¹⁰³⁾

Paget's speeches to the General Management Committee and the ideas circulating in the meetings of the Northampton Left Book Club, to which many of the younger activists belonged, presented little real challenge to the way the party leadership had conducted themselves in public life. The dichotomy between local perceptions of the appropriate policy for industry and 'socialist' theory had been far more acute during the lifetime of the second Labour Government. Then Malone's attempts to act as a spokesman for the needs of Northampton and its major industry had foundered on Sir Oswald Mosley's belief that rationalisation was the solution to all industrial problems.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

103. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, p77

104. *Shoe and Leather News*, 28th November 1929 and *Chronicle and Echo*, 23rd February 1930. At a dinner given by the NBSMA in 1929, Malone offered to take a deputation of shoe manufacturers to meet Government Ministers and seek state aid for trade with the USSR. Oswald Mosley refused the delegation and advocated shoe manufacturers "setting their own house in order" and "merging in larger scale enterprises".

In the late 1930's the shoe industry was beginning to expand.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ There was no urgent necessity for the party to offer public pronouncements on solutions to the economic malaise. The public work of the party and much of the private discussion, centred on the issue of peace, the war in Spain and disarmament. Within the confines of the Labour party meeting the burning issue was the tactical merit or otherwise of the 'United Front'. In June 1936 the NCLP passed a resolution supporting a United Front with the Communist party by 24 votes to 17.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ From then on the executive of the Northampton party abided by the letter of the NEC's instructions about co-operation with Communists, whilst quietly ignoring the spirit of the ban. The NCP was treated with the toleration due to an organisation which still provided a few recruits to the Labour movement.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ The Trades Council was if anything, more inclined to tolerance than the Labour party, despite the fact that it was under instruction from the TUC to bar Communists from its ranks and even though its most important affiliate was opposed to a United Front.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

Whereas the anti-establishment temper of the 'left' in the constituency Labour party in 1931 to 1933 had been expressed in attacks on the Labour group on the Borough Council and in hostility toward local church and chapel leaders, after 1935 it was the national leadership of the Labour party who were berated. The General Management Committee castigated the Labour party for its policies on Spain, the threat of war with Germany and the expulsion of Sir Stafford Cripps.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ The party's local leadership, which still consisted predominantly of Councillors and older activists schooled in a more consensual tradition, came under no such sustained criticism. There was a

105. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp420-428

106. NCLP Minutes June 1936

107. NCLP Minutes September 1937

108. Northampton Trades Council correspondence with the NCLP March and April 1938. The Labour Party Agent requested that the Trades Council delegate to the May Day committee be replaced because he was a member of the Communist Party. This request was refused

109. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, pp72 and 75

moment in September 1938 when it seemed as though the municipal strategy of the Labour group might be rethought in the light of 'United Front' ideas. But a move to instruct the Labour group to give up all chairmanship and vice-chairmanships of committees and become "an effective and independent opposition",⁽¹¹⁰⁾ was quickly abandoned. An idea which had some appeal in the context of the Liberals decline to third place on the Council in 1937, lost its momentum when the Conservative Group improved its position in 1938.

In effect the more conflict orientated world view which the activists now espoused was publically expressed only in the context of international issues. Like the immediately post World War I converts to socialism, the activists of the late 1930's were primarily interested in peace. They had only a superficial interest in industrial and even municipal issues, especially once the unemployment problem had receded. Though they continued to support United Front ideas and rejected the Popular Front concept gaining currency both in the Labour party and the Communist party,⁽¹¹¹⁾ they welcomed ex-Liberals into Northampton Labour party with enthusiasm and did not question with any rigour the co-operative arrangement of town council affairs. The fact that ~~some~~ of their own leadership and prominent converts from Liberalism⁽¹¹²⁾ were drawn from the class which was theoretically the enemy, does not seem to have caused any friction. The only example of any individual businessman coming under attack occurred at the very close of the period when Bassett Lowke was challenged with regard to his associations with the Link, an Anglo-German organisation suspected of being a Fascist front.⁽¹¹³⁾ The activists retained their respect for high status individuals: businessmen, Councillors and Members of Parliament. They remained, if only by default, committed to

110. NCLP Minutes September 1938

111. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p74

112. NCLP Minutes June 1938 Saul Doffman, a local businessman and an ex-Liberal Councillor joined the Labour party

113. NCLP Minutes July 1939

policies, attitudes and behaviour which suggested that whatever conflicts occurred in the wider world they had little relevance to life in Northampton. Labour activists were in conflict with world capitalism, fascism, financiers and on occasion, national leaders of their own party. They relied on the leadership of the talented and able. Their ideology bore a striking resemblance to that of the Northampton business community. In the 1930's, as in the 1920's however, labour spokesmen used a language which gave the impression that they were far more 'revolutionary' than they actually were.

A LABOUR MOVEMENT SUBCULTURE?

So far the focus has been on the active membership of the Labour movement organisations in Northampton. Even though their ideology seems to have been only a variant on the ethos of the town's public culture, the class language they used could be seen as a source of challenge to community values. But this would depend on the activists' ability to transmit their ideas to a wider group. Much of the political and social life of Labour Councillors was conducted in such a way as to bring them into close contact with, and under pressure from, the prevailing town ethos. Nonetheless, the activists did have access to a Labour movement subculture. In the years immediately following World War I they also, briefly, had the possibility of enlarging the circle in which their ideas were dominant and taking control of their transmission. The affiliation of the NCS to the Labour party in 1918 gave the activists the opportunity to use the funds of a thriving trading organisation and its mass membership. The Society's Education Committee was sufficiently well financed to employ a full time officer and until 1921 he was involved in creating structures designed to give the Labour movement a life of its own. He was instrumental in setting up the Northampton WEA in 1919, promoting discussion between trade unionists and co-operators and

building up the Co-operative Women's Guilds, Youth Circle and Men's Choir.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ Perhaps even more importantly the Education Committee's Secretary organised a body of volunteers to deliver the Wheatsheaf, the Co-operative Society's journal, to every co-operative shareholder in Northampton. Besides giving the newly formed Labour party a free meeting place and office, the Society also gave the party access to its advertising hoardings and was a major shareholder in the 'Peoples Outlook', an ILP newspaper which circulated all over Northamptonshire and North Buckinghamshire in the early 1920's.⁽¹¹⁵⁾

In 1921, with the disaffiliation of the Society, the Labour movement was deprived of all these valuable assets. The 'Peoples Outlook' went into liquidation, the NCLP was evicted from the Co-operative rooms and the educational work of the Co-operative Society was considerably handicapped by cuts in its funding and dismissal of the full time organiser.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ It was only in the latter part of the 1930's that the party was able to employ its own full time agent and begin work on establishing a party newspaper, the 'Town Cryer'.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Important sources of funding and alternative employment for activists, were lost in the early 1920's. The Northampton SDF and the ILP had set up their own boot factories before World War I. Though small, they had offered some activists work in a sympathetic environment. While they were prosperous, they had generated funds for both local and national levels of their organisations. The SDF lost control of the Pioneer Boot and Shoe Co-operative during the Great War and it was reformed as a workers co-operative, but its manager was still an SDF member. However, the post war depression led to the winding up of both businesses.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

114. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p31

115. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p31

116. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p31

117. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p37

118. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p26

The only source of Labour movement employment for the majority of the period, with the exception of paid office in a trade union, was the NCS. Even after the retreat of 1921, the Society's executive committee did continue to offer this minimum service to the Labour movement.

A similar policy of very low profile involvement with the political wing of the movement was adopted by some of the town's Working Men's clubs. Two of the thirteen clubs in Northampton had a history of political and trade union associations. The Trades and Labour Club had been brought into being in the 1890's, under the sponsorship of NUBSO.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ The Twentieth Century Club had been formed by the Northampton SDF. As at Pioneer Boot and Shoe Co-operative the SDF lost direct political control as a result of divisions within its own ranks, but the club's Executive Secretary and the committee continued to be sympathetic.⁽¹²⁰⁾ Up until 1921 indeed the club^s seem to have had a political dimension and openly political leadership.⁽¹²¹⁾ But when wartime controls on the clubs were removed they passed into an era of expansion. At least three clubs were able to move into new, purpose built premises between 1923 and 1928.⁽¹²²⁾ They became more ambitious and lavish in the provision of entertainment for a clientele drawn from both the working class and the lower middle class. The clubs retained a tradition of providing a social service for their members, through their Convalescent Home Fund for example.⁽¹²³⁾ The Working Men's Clubs Committees were also heavily involved in charitable fund raising and were strong supporters of the Working Men's Blind Association and the Working Men's Club Charity Committee, which raised funds for the

119. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p331

120. Northampton Daily Chronicle, 17th April 1930. Will Kirkton, the club's Secretary and a trustee had been SDF Councillor in 1908

121. Northampton Mercury, 21st February 1921. Will Kirkton and W R Townley, a Labour Councillor, were speakers at a meeting to demand the removal of wartime controls on the clubs

122. Northampton Independent, 1st January 1927 and 27th October 1928

123. A L Bowley, Has Poverty Diminished? p58

Northampton General Hospital.⁽¹²⁴⁾ Through such activities they were brought more closely in touch with the mainstream of voluntary charities in the town as well as with those Socialist leaders who were also engaged in charitable work. None of the clubs kept up the educational function which at least some of them had been established to perform. Thus, although some club committee members had Labour Movement connections the clubs themselves did not usually provide the kind of social life which might be expected to promote working class separatism or class solidarity.

NUBSO's unusually large number of paid officers⁽¹²⁵⁾ were an important factor in promoting close contact between the union and its largely passive membership. Its policy of holding secret ballots, both for the election of these officials and in respect of national negotiations on pay and conditions, encouraged activists to campaign for votes. But in the absence of a high attendance at union meetings or public meetings, officials were not able to offer more than a very piecemeal and fragmented exposition of their views. The only other union with a mass membership in the locality, the NUR, went through a series of disputes between 1919 and 1921 which offered activists a unique opportunity to draw on the lessons of an industrial conflict in propagandising for socialism.⁽¹²⁶⁾ The public meetings and rallies held in Northampton were well supported and the strike calls were fully heeded. The NCS gave its full support to the strikers and the President of the Society, Will Rogers, was a prominent figure on strike platforms. NUBSO and the Trades Council also provided their share of public speakers.⁽¹²⁷⁾ The NCLP's choice of an NUR sponsored candidate for the 1918 General Election in the run up to the first

124. Annual Reports of the Northampton Town and County Blind Association 1919-1939 and Northampton Independent, 21st April 1928

125. Goodman, Armstrong Davies and Wagner, Rule Making and Industrial Peace (1977), p78

126. A J P Taylor, English History, pp189-190 and 196

127. Northampton Herald, 3rd and 10th October 1919, Northampton Mercury, 15th April 1921 and Northampton Independent, 16th April 1921

strike, and the subsequent choice of leading NUR officers as municipal candidates in 1919 further displayed the unity of the Labour Movement on the strike. But in the long term, there was little in either the activists ideology or in the circumstances in which they worked to make trade unionism the most obvious means of propagating or sustaining a socialist perspective.

The Trades Council's concentration on municipal matters has already been mentioned. Its main event of the year, the May Day procession, was in decline by the 1930's. The decision to abandon the event and replace it with Round table conferences and a meeting on the Market Square, was precipitated by the ~~intervention~~ of the ILP and the CP, but it was also based on the lack of interest shown in earlier years. Overall there was a growing tendency to segregate trade union organisation from the conduct of the political Labour movement. The Railway strike and the events of 1919 and 1921 were exceptional. Even the General Strike did not create an equivalent atmosphere. Only the NUR, those tramway workers who were in the TGWU and Typographical Association Members were directly involved.⁽¹²⁸⁾ The Trades Council kept only a watching brief and the NCS was not even approached for support.⁽¹²⁹⁾

For the majority of the period political propaganda and any attempt to create a socialist orientated working class subculture in Northampton was left to the Labour party. But the early loss of a socialist newspaper and a low level of participation by its membership made the task difficult. It was only really attempted when elections and recruitment drives made it imperative. Ward meetings were poorly attended and thus, those responsible for ward activities were often the same individuals who made up the delegates to the

128. The British Worker, 7th May 1926

129. E Burns, The General Strike (date of publication not known), p152

GMC and were the party's Councillors and co-opted members of Borough Council Committees. For most ordinary members initial recruitment often involved the receipt of pamphlets and leaflets arguing the case for socialism but subsequent contacts with the party were limited. In one ward in 1929, for example, 240 new members were enrolled and yet the average number at branch meetings that year never exceeded 9.⁽¹³⁰⁾ For the active membership the principal concern was not how to ensure that the recruits shared in the life and the beliefs of the party, but how to carry out the daunting effort of collecting their annual subscriptions. Even in the 1930's when the NCLP's membership was less than half of its peak in the 1920's, the problem that continually surfaced at GMC meetings was how to sustain dues collection.⁽¹³¹⁾ Some party members and supporters could be persuaded to attend social functions and public meetings. Through such activity many otherwise passive members were brought intermittently into contact with the more active and involved in some important aspects of the party's ideology. But perhaps the most obvious message was an awareness of the exceptional status of certain individuals in the Labour movement. These events usually featured a speaker or guest with either a national or local reputation in the Labour movement. F O Roberts was a popular choice for such occasions, for example, as was Lees-Smith, the ex-Liberal.⁽¹³²⁾ The fact that both public meetings and socials were generally held in aid of elections meant, of course, that the participants were also made conscious of the primary role of the elected member in the socialist project. Thus, in 1931, when the Labour Government fell, the Party's membership halved overnight.⁽¹³³⁾ An image of failure and disunity, with Labour portrayed as in opposition to the national interest easily demoralised many of the passive 1920's recruits.

130. Minutes of Kingsley Ward Labour Party January 1929 to December 1929

131. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, pp35-36

132. Northampton Independent, 21st October 1933

133. M Dickie, *The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party*, p35

The mass membership of the NCLP was clearly a very imperfect channel for the communication of socialist ideas to the wider citizenry. In daily contact with workmates and neighbours, they probably did assist in building up the reputation of the party's leading figures. It is doubtful if they even attempted to argue the case for nationalisation or municipalisation. This task was left to the active membership. It was through the publications of pamphlets and leaflets and public speeches, that the party's ideology had to be expressed. As we have already noted, some individual party members did see their role as expounding the intellectual argument for a transformation of the economic system. The municipal election leaflets of 1919 in particular conformed to this view of the function of public propaganda, but thereafter there was an increased emphasis on specific reforms and the success of the Labour Councillors in implementing them.⁽¹³⁴⁾ From time to time candidates in both Borough and Board of Guardians elections made a reference, in speeches and in circulated addresses, to the evils of the capitalist system or the need for socialist experiments but this was usually as an introduction to the main theme. The speeches of the parliamentary candidates, similarly contained a mixture of references to the sterling personal qualities of the candidate and often oblique references to the vision of socialism. In 1924, at the height of the 'Zinoviev letter' smear campaign, for example, Margaret Bondfield's election address was entitled 'Home again Bondfield - the Dawn of a new era' and illustrated with a drawing of an attractive, modern house.⁽¹³⁵⁾ During the 1930's there is more evidence of national propaganda material and national speakers being used. In 1934 Northampton was one of the centres chosen for the launching of Labour's Peace and Freedom Campaign.⁽¹³⁶⁾ But although both national and local speakers made increasing reference to "Fascism" and "World Capitalism"⁽¹³⁷⁾ the tone of municipal

134. NCLP Collection of Municipal Election leaflets and posters

135. NCLP Collection of Parliamentary election leaflets

136. NCLP Collection of Public Meeting leaflets

137. NCLP Collection of Public Meeting leaflets and associated press cuttings

election leaflets was, if anything, even more orientated toward an image of Labour leaders serving a united Community. In both 1932 and 1933, when the Northampton community appeared at its most disunited, leaflets pointed out that "the policy they (the Labour Members) have advocated has often times been accepted and carried into effect" and stressed that "Labour will endeavour to make Northampton one of the most attractive towns in which to live".⁽¹³⁸⁾ In a municipal by-election in May 1933, the Labour Candidate repeated this argument, insisting that he was intent on "making the town an even more desirable place of residence".⁽¹³⁹⁾

Municipal elections were held annually and the involvement of Councillors and co-opted members in the committees of the Borough Council, was a regular commitment throughout the year. This in itself ensured that it was the consensual aspect of Labour ideology which was most prominently displayed. The access to newspaper coverage provided by Council work gave it a special value in the context of the party's propaganda effort. Leaflets, pamphlets and public meetings were self-evidently a less efficient means of putting forward ideas than the local press. Throughout the 1920's activists were conscious of their opponents advantage in this respect and they welcomed the Chronicle and Echo's policy of offering all party's the opportunity of stating their case.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ But although the 1930's saw the demise of the party political press in Northampton, it did not see a change in the values which the press supported. Labour activists continued to be aware that they were only accorded at best, an ambiguous recognition of their legitimacy. The temptation to reach a more permanent and formal accord with the Liberal party on the Council was very great. In 1927, at least one well-known party member gave way to temptation and publically supported a Liberal candidate in

138. NCLP Collection of Municipal Election leaflets

139. NCLP Election Address for the Spencer by-election 2nd May 1933

140. Chronicle and Echo, 2nd November 1933. F O Roberts congratulated the editor on his "foresight and courtesy" in starting an 'election forum' feature in the newspaper open to all Parties

a municipal seat which Labour was not contesting.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ His justification for that action, the personal qualities of the candidate and support for progressive policies, found some sympathy in the party. An attempt to pass a motion of censure failed.⁽¹⁴²⁾ But the Labour group's retreat from an accord on postponing municipal elections in 1931 and the party's insistence on contesting elections against incoming and outgoing Mayors throughout the 1930's, was more representative of the activists' stance. The election contest was sacrosanct. It symbolised their continuing belief in the socialist project,⁽¹⁴³⁾ and their determination to present the intellectual arguments for socialism even if it led to them being misrepresented by the town establishment and the local press.

CONCLUSION

The beliefs and attitudes of Labour party activists and their contemporaries in the rest of the Labour movement were, as we have seen, by no means entirely at odds with those of the middle class establishment in Northampton. They shared a belief in the importance of the talented individual and a conviction that municipal politics and intervention in the economy were vital. Many of their attitudes to 'outsiders' were similar. Foreign competitors, financiers and central government were viewed with suspicion and hostility by them all. Activists from all parties often had a similar social background and the nature of local politics and industrial relations brought them into close and personal contact. Thus, Labour's subculture was never sufficiently exclusive of the mainstream of the town's political and social life to render those involved in it immune from influence. But the Labour movement was strong enough to ensure that variants of socialist thought were absorbed

141. Northampton Independent, 20th October 1927

142. NCLP Men's Section Minutes November 1927

143. M Dickie, The Ideology of Northampton Labour Party, p74

rather than allowed to stand as alternatives to its philosophy. Through the Borough Council, activists were given the chance to exercise some influence and even power and this enhanced their conviction that change was dependent on success at the polls. In order to win that success, Northampton Socialists stressed their own town patriotism. Their language and conduct sometimes suggested class antagonism, but it did not really play a large part in their ideology. Where the activists had some control of the transmission of their ideas to the electorate they tended to emphasise their claims to a role in the municipal meritocracy. It remains to be seen whether those claims were accepted.

CHAPTER 5

NORTHAMPTONIANS - THEIR VALUES AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR

INTRODUCTION

In all the preceding chapters the emphasis has been on the activities and beliefs of small groups within the Northampton population. The views of businessmen, mainstream politicians and Communist activists are relatively easy to establish, given the documentary evidence. But the ideals, hopes and feelings of a whole population are inevitably obscure. For the most part this chapter will seek to draw on the experiences of Northampton people and to use them to offer possible explanations of their voting behaviour. The public culture of town patriotism and the Labour movement's ideology both offered an image of a community with common interests, often under attack by outsiders but led by wise and benevolent men. At the same time employers and Labour movement figures each suggested to some degree that the other was not serving that common interest. There were clearly moments of crisis, most notably in 1933 and 1934, when such differences were at their most exposed. It is in this context of competing explanations and claims to represent the community that the experiences and responses of the electorate will be placed.

VOTING FOR CLASS OR COMMUNITY?

From 1918 onwards, the parliamentary electorate included all adult males and women over 30 years of age and in 1928 a universal adult franchise was introduced for the first time.⁽¹⁾ But although such elections provide a

1. A J P Taylor, English History, p332

snapshot in time of local opinion, it is difficult to deduce much information from them about the attitudes of groups within the electorate. Local elections took place more regularly and can be used to breakdown the electorate into smaller groups more closely related to neighbourhoods, class and occupation. But ... voters in municipal elections were still enfranchised by their occupation of property rather than their status as adults. Owners and tenants of rateable property and their wives over 30 years of age⁽²⁾ made up the municipal electorates until 1928, when women were enfranchised on the same basis as their husbands. The municipal electorate tended, therefore, to be older than the parliamentary electorate taken as a whole. Lodgers were only allowed to vote if the property in which they lived had been subdivided for rating purposes, thus it could be that the municipal electorate was also biased in favour of the more prosperous. But according to the Northampton Electoral Roll⁽³⁾ for 1932 one quarter of all those entitled to vote in parliamentary elections in Northampton were disqualified from voting in municipal elections. The level of disenfranchisement differed from Ward to Ward, but it was as high in some Wards with a large middle class population as in the town's poorest areas. Age rather than prosperity seems to have been the most significant factor of difference between the two electorates.

Voting behaviour is capable of a variety of interpretations and at first sight the voting pattern in Northampton from 1918 to 1939 does not seem to take us very far in establishing the influence of town patriotism amongst voters. The level of participation in elections, both parliamentary and municipal was usually 10% above the national average from 1918 to 1931.⁽⁴⁾ In the 1930's the percentage of abstentions rose but Northampton still had

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2. B Keith Lucas and T G Richards, A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century (1978), pp18-32
 3. Northampton Election Registers 1932
 4. F W S Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949, pp50-55 and Northampton Herald, November 1919 to 1930

an above average level of voter participation, ... if a willingness to cast ones votes is an indicator of community feeling,⁽⁵⁾ it could be argued that this was a sign that town patriotism was important to the Northampton electorate. However, in the 1918 General election, W R Halls, the Labour candidate received 37% of the votes cast, a much higher percentage of the vote than the Labour party achieved nationally.⁽⁶⁾ Halls' voter share was also a considerable improvement on the maximum 20% of the vote recorded by the SDF in parliamentary elections before the war.⁽⁷⁾ Labour in Northampton was advancing in the immediately post war period. But it was the three-way split of the vote, after the breakdown of the National Coalition, which helped Labour gain the Northampton seat in 1923, at a by-election in 1928 and again in 1929. At a by-election in 1920 and at the General elections of 1923 and 1929, Labour nonetheless gained 40% of the votes cast. In 1935 Labour came very close to winning the parliamentary seat in a straight fight with a Conservative opponent. Reginald Paget, the Labour candidate, had over 48% of the votes cast. Labour's overall performance was good by national standards and showed strong surges in both 1918 and 1935. In the 1919 municipal elections Labour candidates did even better than Halls had in the parliamentary election, averaging just over 49% of the vote.⁽⁸⁾ Between 1920 and 1929 the Labour party's municipal vote hovered around 37% of the votes cast, by comparison with around 39% averaged in parliamentary elections in the same period. The lack of any major variation in voting habits between municipal and parliamentary elections, except in the 1918 and 1919 case, seems to suggest that voters were generally consistent in their preferences.

5. W Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, pp1-5

6. M Pugh, *Modern British Politics*, pp242-243. Labour's national share of the vote was only 22% in 1918, though the figure is distorted by the small number of candidates standing. By 1929 the party was achieving 37% of the national vote

7. F W S Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1895-1918* (1969), p20

8. All references to Northampton municipal election results are based on the figures published in the *Northampton Mercury* November 1919 to November 1930 and in the *Mercury and Herald* in March 1932 and November 1933 to 1938

The 1918 and 1919 election results, however, indicates the possibility of a complex interaction between class loyalties and town patriotism. Labour's exceptional level of support in the Borough Council elections in 1919 was based on gaining over 50% of the votes cast in four Wards. In North Ward, where the SDF had done particularly well before the war,⁽⁹⁾ Labour had 61% of the vote in 1919. In St Crispin and the neighbouring St Lawrence Wards the 1919 vote represented an even greater improvement on pre-war socialist performance. The 11% advance in North Ward was dwarfed by a 20% and 39% advance in these two Wards. The fourth area in which Labour increased its share of the vote dramatically was Delapre. In this Ward Labour received 72% of the votes cast by comparison with the socialist average of 33% pre-war. Delapre not only gave the Labour party its highest percentage of the poll but had the highest turnout of any Ward in the town. As 70% of the municipal electorate in Delapre actually used their vote, Labour could claim that it had achieved an absolute majority in this restricted, older electorate. The NCLP's support in all four Wards could be interpreted as a by product of trade union militancy. Three of the Wards concerned were on the North East of Northampton where shoe factory work was concentrated.⁽¹⁰⁾ In 1918 NUBSO had capitalised on the continuing boom in the industry to negotiate a new national agreement with the FBSMA and achieve significant advances in wages and conditions.⁽¹¹⁾ A ballot of Northampton NUBSO members in 1920, when union bargaining power was already beginning to decline, indicates that the collectivist attitudes expressed in unofficial strikes in 1912 and 1913 were still prevalent. Shoe operatives voted in large numbers and by an overwhelming majority for a return to day work and to the 'share the work' principles they preferred.⁽¹²⁾ In February 1921 the membership was balloted

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9. Northampton Herald, November 1906 to 1913
 10. P R Mounfield, Location of Footwear Manufacture, p165
 11. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp409-410
 12. Northampton Mercury, 17th December 1920. In all, 10917 operatives voted to return to day work and 2965 against, out of the 17000 eligible to vote

once again in response to the TUC initiative for a protest strike against unemployment. Despite the fact that a local agreement had been concluded which protected Northampton operatives from the worst effects of the 1921 depression, nearly seven thousand voted for strike action.⁽¹³⁾ The shoe operatives' militancy was more than matched by that of local railway workers who were particularly well represented in Delapre.⁽¹⁴⁾ The high turnout and majority support for Labour in that Ward could be seen as reflecting the spirit engendered by the NUR's campaign for nationalisation of the industry and the impact of the 1919 national railway strike on attitudes.⁽¹⁵⁾

Yet despite the coincidence of militancy in industry with Labour voting amongst shoe operatives and railway workers, it would appear that they were influenced by a traditional pattern of loyalties. They were not rejecting the values offered by the public culture but interpreting them in the contest of their own experience. Labour's candidate in the 1918 General election had been an NUR official with responsibility for the Northampton area.⁽¹⁶⁾ He may have gained some support from railway workers on the grounds of occupational solidarity, but the effect was clearly magnified in the context of the 1919 election in Delapre. John Webb, an ex-Liberal railwayman resident in the area,⁽¹⁷⁾ appealed directly to workplace and neighbourhood feeling. He urged the electors to vote for "the trade unionist who has lived amongst you from a boy".⁽¹⁸⁾ Significantly, there were no further Labour victories in Delapre until 1929. The Labour vote declined to pre-war levels from 1920 to 1921. Neither anticipation of victory for the NUR in 1920, nor

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13. Northampton Mercury, 25th February 1921. 6918 voted for the protest strike and 1084 against
 14. T H Mawson and Sons, Proposals for Development of Northampton, p76
 15. Northampton Herald, 3rd October 1919
 16. P Wyncoll, the Nottingham Labour Movement, p200
 17. Northampton Independent, 8th November 1919
 18. NCLP Collection of Municipal election leaflets and posters

anger at betrayal in the wake of the 1921 national strike⁽¹⁹⁾ gave any impetus toward Labour voting in the absence of a candidate from the railway community. In 1929 there was again a high turnout and a level of Labour voting comparable to that in 1919. The Labour candidate in 1929 was, however, not a railwayman but a shoe manufacturer. William Barratt, as one of the town's most prominent industrialists, epitomised the type of individual idealised in the public culture. His success in a Ward which had no shoe manufacturing plant cannot be interpreted as a sign of deference to a man with direct influence over the livelihood of the electors but it does suggest that Labour benefited from its identification with the values Barratt represented. As Delapre demonstrated once again in 1932 a preference for neighbourhood candidates and community values which favoured the claims of the elite were not incompatible. At the full election⁽²⁰⁾ in 1932 two out of three of Delapre's Labour candidates were elected. William Barratt was returned once more. The other Labour candidate returned was Mrs Nicholls, a recognised member of Delapre Railway Community. As the daughter and the wife of railway workers, her family connections made her an integral part of the occupational neighbourhood.⁽²¹⁾ F C Ashford, the third Councillor elected, was a Liberal. He was also the local chemist and had represented the Ward as its Councillor since 1905.⁽²²⁾

Delapre's transition from electing two Conservatives and one Liberal Councillor after 1919 to returning two Labour Councillors and one Liberal from 1932, suggests that men and women who retained an habitual sympathy with the Liberal party found it acceptable to vote Labour when the candidates were of a high status or conformed to a neighbourhood image. Unless Labour presented itself in one of these two ways, it had little chance of success.

19. A J P Taylor, English History, p196

20. The normal one-third rotation of Councillors in annual elections was replaced for 1932 with an election for all seats in a new Ward structure on the new Borough Boundary.

21. Northampton Independent, 8th August 1947

22. Northampton Herald, 4th November 1927

While the contribution of new voters could be seen as having some effect on move to Labour in Delapre, the voting pattern in other Wards confirms the impression that candidate status was more important. In St Crispin Ward a Labour Councillor was returned every third year from 1923 onwards. Toby Lyne, who became Labour's sole long term Councillor for the Ward, was a local NUBSO official and resident in the area.⁽²³⁾ His long run of success might be interpreted as a coincidental reflection of Labour's popularity in particular years for he was re-elected in 1926 and again in 1929. But this assumption is contradicted by the circumstances of the 1932 and 1935 elections. In 1932 Lyne was re-elected on the same day and by the same voters who returned two Conservative Councillors. At a by-election in 1935, a Conservative candidate was again successful, but Toby Lyne still retained his majority a month later. The St Lawrence Ward, Labour in 1919, elected two Conservative and one Liberal to serve from 1920 to 1927. In 1928 Labour defeated one of the Conservative Councillors in a three-cornered contest, but it was only in 1930 that Labour was able to repeat its 1919 performance and elect a Councillor by a majority of the votes cast. As in Delapre Ward in 1929 Labour presented an elite candidate. Bassett Lowke had a high profile in the commercial, charitable and voluntary life of Northampton but was not an important manufacturer within the Ward.⁽²⁴⁾ Notably, William Barratt, who had become Delapre's Labour Councillor in the previous year, was one of the major employers in St Lawrence⁽²⁵⁾ and thus the candidate may have benefited indirectly from Barratt's status as well as his own.

23. Northampton Herald, 2nd November 1923 and Northampton Independent, 24th November 1923

24. R Fuller, the Bassett Lowke Story, p10. The Bassett Lowke engineering workshops were in the town centre. They may have attracted some workers from the Ward, but since the plant itself was small their contribution to the vote would have been insignificant

25. The Barratt Shoe factory built in 1913 is still standing. It is located on the boundary between the old North and St Lawrence Wards

The rather erratic voting patterns of Delapre, St Crispin and St Lawrence Wards contrast markedly with the consistent return of Labour candidates in North Ward during the 1920's. Yet in this Ward too there is evidence to suggest that Labour support was based less on class consciousness than on the legitimacy which some members of the party had been accorded in the public culture. The reputation which the Ward had acquired as a socialist and then a Labour stronghold seems to have deterred other parties from nominating candidates in the elections of 1923, 1924 and 1929. This in itself could have given voters the impression that Labour representatives had special claims to a place in the meritocracy. The NLA and NCUA placed a high premium on such tokens of recognition as they made clear when they tried to persuade the Labour group not to oppose incoming and outgoing Mayors in the 1930's. North Ward's representatives were men of particular prominence in the Labour group. They included Slinn,⁽²⁶⁾ the Labour group leader and Housing Chairman, Albert Burrows who succeeded him as Labour group leader⁽²⁷⁾ and C J Scott, the first Labour Mayor.⁽²⁸⁾ Len Smith⁽²⁹⁾ and James Gribble⁽³⁰⁾ local officials of NUBSO were also Councillors for North Ward in the 1920's. All these individuals enjoyed acknowledged status in the public culture, although some of them were subjected to attack. James Gribble was sometimes condemned as a "revolutionary"⁽³¹⁾ and Len Smith was described as a "confessed Communist".⁽³²⁾ But the local press acknowledged that:

it is generally recognised that Mr Gribble is one of the ablest Socialists that Northampton has ever produced and one of her ablest citizens .⁽³³⁾

26. Slinn was elected for North Ward in 1910. He became an Alderman in 1923

27. C J Scott served from 1923 to 1932, when the Ward disappeared in the boundary reorganisation

28. Burrows was a Councillor for North Ward from 1924 to 1930

29. Smith served one term as a North Ward Councillor from 1921 to 1923

30. Gribble was a North Ward Councillor from 1903 to 1909 and again from 1923 to 1926

31. Northampton Independent, 3rd April 1920

32. Northampton Independent, 23rd April 1921

33. Northampton Mercury, 3rd July 1925

As the most well known of Labour's Councillors in North Ward died, departed for high national office in NUBSO, or became Aldermen⁽³⁴⁾ the Labour party had to field less well-known candidates and majorities were reduced. In 1930 the Labour vote declined and Labour had a majority of only 55 votes.⁽³⁵⁾

North and Delapre were the two Northampton Wards with the highest proportion of working class electors^(table 2, chapter 1) but they were different from one another in most other respects. North Ward had a population made up of shoe operatives and tannery workers. Its borders were marked only by road boundaries and it was not otherwise divided from the rest of the town. Delapre had a long history of association with the railway and its occupational community was preserved intact by physical segregation from the rest of Northampton. The River Nene and the railway itself acted as a barrier to intercourse. St James which also had a very high representation of working class voters, shared some of Delapre's geographical isolation and occupational division from the rest of the town. It did have three medium sized shoe factories but was also Northampton's major engineering area.⁽³⁶⁾ H W Dover Ltd and Smith Major & Stevens Ltd, situated in St James, were two of the largest engineering firms in the town. But unlike the residents of Delapre and North Ward, St James' electors remained unrepresented by Labour for the whole of the period. In 1919 the Labour candidate did receive 44% of the votes cast but the Labour vote then fell to 30% of the total in 1921 and 24% in 1924. For most of the 1920's St James Ward was represented by Councillors from one manufacturing family. The Lewis Brothers were resident in the nearby village of Dallington and had a long history of association with St James' chapels and charities⁽³⁷⁾ and one of the three shoe factories in the area. Just as

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- 34. Gribble retired due to ill health and died in 1934, Scott and Burrows became Aldermen and Smith became a national organiser for NUBSO
 - 35. The Labour candidate in 1930 was a commercial traveller, an SDF activist of long standing but not a well known figure in either union or public life
 - 36. M F Collins, *Changes in Land Use in Northampton*, pp131-132
 - 37. Shoe Trades Journal, 21st November 1919, Northampton Independent, 3rd December 1927 and 23rd June 1944. The Lewis Brothers had been leading figures in the St James Education League (see Chapter 1)

Labour was only able to challenge Liberal and Conservative candidates given an appropriate candidate, the Conservatives were unsuccessful in St James until they adopted similar tactics against the Liberal Lewis family.

Bernard Scotney, the recently retired Inspector in charge of the St James Police Station,⁽³⁸⁾ was nominated as the Conservative candidate in 1928. It was only the second occasion on which the Conservatives had contested the Ward since the war. In 1926 a three party contest had attracted a high turnout of 73% of electors, but in 1928 Scotney's candidature attracted even greater interest and 76% of those eligible to vote did so. The fact that the Conservative candidate was a well known figure in St James and lived in the Ward clearly had an influence on the turnout and the result. Scotney polled three hundred more votes than the Conservative in 1926 and George Lewis two hundred fewer than the 1926 Liberal candidate.

High turnouts at some municipal elections and the success of particular individuals at the polls indicate that personal qualifications for office influenced voters. But this must be placed in the context of the way agreements between the NCUA and NLA preserved party loyalties. There were a few Wards which had been given over wholesale to one party. Only one Liberal seat was uncontested by the Conservatives throughout the 1919-1930 period. The Liberals did not put forward candidates in South Ward and were irregular contestants in six other Wards. But in the majority of Wards there was an opportunity to vote for a candidate representing the voters first choice of party in at least one out of three years. Even when the NCUA became more aggressive in its election tactics in the late 1920's and the 1930's, voting habits were not challenged in the way that they might have been with a different type of agreement between the parties. In 1932 the Conservatives forced a pact on the Liberals which involved Liberal concessions even in this strongest Wards.^(table 7) But

38. Northampton Independent, 24th May 1930

Liberal voters were still able to exercise their first preference in out of three years in four Wards and one out of three years in five others. This may account for the erratic results in some elections. Given the opportunity to vote for their own party, if only irregularly, Liberals were unwilling to transfer their allegiance to other parties even when their own was not standing. High turnouts in three-cornered contests may actually indicate a level of abstentionism in other years. But overall, although Ward boundary changes in 1932 make the trend uncertain, Labour seems to have gained in Wards where the Liberal presence had been weak. In strong Liberal areas, such as St James and Kingsley, the transition to voting Conservative and Liberal was made more easily.

However, while the full municipal election in 1932 offers some evidence of tactical voting by the electorate it does not detract from the view that voters expressed community values as a major feature of voter behaviour. In Kingsthorpe the Labour candidate, Aldred Weston,⁽³⁹⁾ was a shopkeeper in the Kingsthorpe Council estate, recently incorporated into the Ward. He topped the poll with nine hundred votes. Some voters clearly did not exercise their opportunity to vote for two Liberal candidates in the election for the successful Liberal had 812 votes while his runningmate had only 486 votes. The Conservative Councillor elected possibly had a personal following of his own. He was an ex-Liberal and deacon of the Kingsthorpe Baptist Church.⁽⁴⁰⁾ But unless the voters were very confused indeed by the multiple voting which applied in this election, it would seem that a significant number deliberately opted for the candidate not the party. In most Wards Labour had mixed fortunes but Castle Ward became the new Labour stronghold in 1932.

Up until 1928 the Ward had been Conservative. Here again, personal reputation of candidates seems to have played a part in voter behaviour. The deputy

39. Chronicle and Echo, 21st October 1935

40. Northampton Herald, 8th November 1929 and 7th November 1930

Chairman of the Housing Committee, J V Collier, represented the Ward throughout the 1920's, but in 1928 he was elevated to an Aldermanic seat and the Conservatives were obliged to put forward a new and unknown candidate.⁽⁴¹⁾ Mrs Adams, the Labour nominee, was already a member of the Board of Guardians⁽⁴²⁾ and as such could offer the kind of personal help and assistance Collier had given. The election of Mrs Adams in 1928 and yet another Labour Councillor in 1929 signalled growing disillusionment with Conservatism and a greater acceptance of Labour's claims once a well respected Conservative had gone. Labour voting in this area as in others was dependent on the presentation of candidates who inspired confidence. It is notable that Labour's third successful candidate in the 1932 election was F O Roberts, who had been a Minister in two Labour Governments.⁽⁴³⁾

At least up until 1933 and with the possible exception of 1919 Labour's municipal representation in Northampton was conditioned by the degree of legitimacy its candidates enjoyed in a public culture stressing community rather than class values. But this does not mean that voters of different classes were equally disposed to recognise Labour's claims to a place in the meritocracy. A statistical test correlating the rank order of the Labour vote by Ward with the proportion of working class housing in the area shows that Labour voters were drawn overwhelmingly from the working class electorate.⁽⁴⁴⁾

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41. ----- In Living Memory, Life in the Boroughs edited by Northampton Arts Development (Northampton 1987), p123. Collier lived on the edge of this district of Castle Ward in one of better town centre streets. Local people remember him driving home through the Boroughs and giving the children rides in his car
 42. Northampton Independent, 29th October 1927
 43. Chronicle and Echo, 24th September 1932. The editor claimed that "there are few more popular men in politics" than F O Roberts
 44. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient has been used to test for a relationship between the rank order of the Labour vote 1919 to 1928 and the rank order of working class housing in the Wards in 1925. The relationship proved statistically significant

Yet that working class was disposed by its own experience, as well as the propaganda for town patriotism, to view the world as made up of an infinite gradation of social differences united in common interest.

THE WORKING CLASS EXPERIENCE

Most working class Northamptonians had been born in the town. Despite the decline and recession in the shoe industry experience in it still shaped the attitudes and values of many workers.⁽⁴⁵⁾ One-industry towns often seem to inculcate in their citizens a sense of identification with the industry and with the managers, supervisors and owners of it. The occupational bond is usually accompanied by a perception of social divisions as being based on the personal qualities of individuals rather than class interest.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The introduction of piecework in 1917 must also have encouraged shoe workers to combine individualism with deference. Two factors affected piecework earnings substantially, the skill and dexterity of the operative and the fairness of the foreman in distributing the work. Even in Northampton's largest factories paternalistic activity combined with the organisation of the shoe factory unit to emphasise the workers individual autonomy and reliance on those of higher status than himself.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Minority industries had their own occupational cultures, but where they were not so dispersed in the population as to be unrecognisable, they tended to share many of the characteristics associated with shoework. A sense of community identity was implicit in the very topography of the town and the location of different industries. Engineering was based in the St James district and railway work in Delapre, both of which were cut off from the rest of Northampton so that neighbourhood and workplace loyalties were interwoven. For railwaymen the occupational and neighbourhood

45. Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1918-1939 include annual mid-year estimates of population

46. R Blauner, Alienation and Freedom (USA 1964), p75

47. Goodman Armstrong Davies and Wagner, Rule Making and Industrial Peace, pp158-159

culture involved a high level of trade union membership as did shoemaking, but the recruitment and geography of the two did not favour the sharing of experience between them. In the other smaller industries workshop conditions and a low level of trade unionism made relations with the firms' owner seem crucial to working life.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Neighbourhood life supported the sense of occupational community in the workplace and confirmed an image of the town as homogeneous and meritocratically ordered. As already mentioned, there were only three Wards in which manual workers and their families were not living alongside families who were either lower middle class or aspiring to that status. In the majority of Wards around 15% of householders were tradesmen or white collar workers. In most areas over 10% of the working class were owner-occupiers. (table 1 chapter 1)

Interwar developments in both private estates and Council housing continued the type of social intercourse between neighbours of different classes established in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Council's policy of housing allocation and its tolerance of rent arrears brought poor, unemployed, skilled and self-employed on to the same estates. Even in the 1930's slum clearance period town centre flats and estate houses were allocated indiscriminately to waiting list and re-housing cases.⁽⁴⁹⁾

The availability of green field sites on both South West and North East of the town meant that both private builders and the Council provided new housing in close proximity to older neighbourhoods. Railway workers on the South West like shoeworkers on the North East could maintain their family and neighbourhood connections by moving within their own area.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The social distinction between the ~~own~~ .

48. Mercury and Herald, Romance of Industry Series, 21st September 1956. Smith Major and Stevens Limited which had migrated from London in 1910 brought many of its employees with it. Members of the same families were still working for the firm in 1956.
49. Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1931 and 1933
50. Northampton Independent, 11th May 1934 and 29th November 1935

and tenant was also undermined by the forced sale of council land to private developers in the early 1920's. Council and private housing was developed side by side.⁽⁵¹⁾

The corner shop, the chapel and the local school were still important meeting places for families with different life styles.⁽⁵²⁾ Indeed local authority provision of secondary schools and the expansion of free places probably encouraged more middle class families to keep their children in the state system. Certainly the corner shop and the chapel played an important social role in districts where the working class neighbourhood was exclusive. In St James and Delapre, for example, there was little inducement to leave the area for shopping or entertainment. Most districts had their own working men's clubs and cinemas and in these South West of the river districts it was very inconvenient to make shopping trips to the town centre. Thus while tradesmen, shop keepers, policemen and ministers did not represent a large group they were as visible and necessary as in a small village. But on the North East of the town too small middle class populations had great importance. In Northampton's small slum district, "the Boroughs", the Minister of the local chapel was reputed to have intervened with the Northampton postmaster to get a sub-post office in the area.⁽⁵³⁾ The sub-post mistress, an active chapel member, was regarded as an influential figure. Poor or respectable working class families depended on the benevolence of special individuals within their own community. The very poor received charity from outside their own neighbourhood, from the Good Samaritan Society or individual charity, but in general it would be the chapel minister, a police officer or local shop keeper who intervened and recommended assistance be given.⁽⁵⁴⁾ A reference

51. Minutes of Northampton Housing and Town Planning Committee, December 1923

52. In unpublished transcripts of the Living Memory Project by Northampton Arts Development

53. In unpublished transcripts of the Living Memory Project by Northampton Arts Development

54. In unpublished transcripts of the Living Memory Project by Northampton Arts Development

from someone of this standing was almost as important to the aspiring working class family as it was to the poorest. Apprenticeships and help with apprenticeship fees were, for example, often secured through neighbourhood intermediaries.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The lower middle class led the campaign for off licence facilities on Northampton's council estates. The Council, as the landlord of the corner shops on the estates, was opposed to alcohol being sold. In the face of Council opposition it was the shop keeper and his self-employed customers who gathered petitions from estate residents and appeared in the Licensing Magistrates Court to demand that an alcohol licence be granted.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Daily life at work and in the neighbourhood confirmed the validity of Northampton's public culture, but it also encouraged manual workers to seek leaders from amongst a wider group than that originally envisaged by industrialists. This may explain why candidates from within the neighbourhood were often preferred. They were more accessible than the elite. Northampton politicians evidently recognised this for a combination of party selection procedures and voter choice meant that in seven out of twelve Wards the majority of serving Councillors from 1919 to 1930 were resident in the Ward which they represented.^(table 8) Even the high votes which Labour candidates received in the 1919 municipal elections could be seen as partly the result of the parallel between neighbourly help from the lower middle class and the professional help given to operatives by their trade union officials in the shoe industry.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Labour candidates in 1919 may also have benefited from the established reputation for social assistance provided by earlier Socialist Councillors. These men had become an integral part of Northampton municipal government during the war and had received their share of public acclaim and reward in a wartime atmosphere which stressed the "patriotism" of labour.

55. In unpublished transcripts of Living Memory Project by Northampton Arts Development

56. Northampton Daily Chronicle, 5th March 1925 and 25th March 1930

57. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, pp438 and 518

Despite the anti-socialist propaganda and atmosphere of conflict in 1918 and 1919 working class Northamptonians may simply not have recognised that then trade union leaders and Socialist Councillors were being defined as outside the social pale.

Nonetheless, the boot and shoe operative ballots of 1920 and 1921 indicate that a large part of the Northampton workforce had a degree of collective spirit. In the face of mounting unemployment they were ready to give up their piecework earnings and share the work available amongst the group. They were willing to take strike action as a political protest even though local employers had already agreed to adopt short time working as a means of counteracting unemployment. The sense of community of interest promoted by the dominance of one major industry in the town was not necessarily productive of docility. The workplace emphasis on employer benevolence and the obligations accepted by middle class neighbours created an expectation that leaders would act for the common good. A failure to fulfil that responsibility could lead to resentment. But what evidence is available suggests that during the 1920's it was trade union leaders who suffered the brunt of the operatives' disappointment. NUBSO was unable to negotiate an end to piecework in 1920 and the TUC strike call in 1921 did not result in any action being taken. From 1920 onwards, National Agreement after National Agreement involved some sacrifice of earlier employee gains.⁽⁵⁸⁾ In 1922 NUBSO again balloted its membership on the issue of strike action. This time less than four thousand of the Northampton membership voted at all and there was a majority against strike action.⁽⁵⁹⁾

58. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p416

59. Northampton Independent, 11th February 1922. Only 3378 members voted of which 2215 were in favour of accepting wage reduction

Apathy and an anxiety to avoid conflict followed on depression conditions in the shoe industry in the Winter of 1921 to 1922 and continued throughout the 1920's. Trade union officials like Len Smith saw the average trade union member as far from class conscious, either in workplace activity or at the ballot box. As Smith pointed out in 1924:

I think myself that the general body of our members are commercialised. They think in terms of f s d and not in terms of how they can better the lives of the community.⁽⁶⁰⁾

When W R Townley, a Northampton NUBSO official and Labour Councillor was elected General President of the union in 1929, the majority of the Northampton membership did not even participate in the ballot.⁽⁶¹⁾ In 1930 when another Northampton NUBSO official and Councillor was proposed for national office only 22% of the Northampton membership voted by comparison with 60% in the country as a whole.⁽⁶²⁾

THE CRISIS OF 1933-1935

In 1933 and 1934, Northampton shoe operatives revived their collective strength. The values and attitudes they had been taught to venerate allowed them to confront their employers not as defenders of a sectarian interest but as citizens intent on maintaining their rights. In 1933 just two thousand shoe operatives were involved in a dispute with ten Northampton manufacturers. NUBSO officials were intent on avoiding a breach of the national 'No Strike' Agreement so each operative was asked to declare that they "would not re-engage under the new terms". In effect they all resigned.⁽⁶³⁾

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- 60. A Fox, A History of NUBSO, p541
 - 61. Shoe and Leather News, 21st November 1929
 - 62. Northampton Herald, 24th October 1930
 - 63. Chronicle and Echo, 14th, 15th and 23rd February 1933

This required courage and great confidence in their fellow operatives. That Winter had seen the highest levels of unemployment in the boot and shoe industry since before the war. Nationally two out of ten shoe operatives were out of work⁽⁶⁴⁾ and in Northampton just under 25% of the workforce had registered as unemployed.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The fact that the ten manufacturers concerned eventually retreated from the confrontation was no doubt partly due to peer pressure. As an earlier chapter has recorded the unilateralists found themselves condemned by their fellow industrialists. NUBSO had a useful ally in William Barratt, who was the President of the NBSMA in 1933.⁽⁶⁶⁾ But by the same token the manufacturers' decision to break with accepted industrial relations policy in the industry was indicative of their desperation. If they had been able to recruit alternative labour or persuade some of their operatives to accept the new conditions they would very probably have persisted in defying the conventions of local industrial relations.

The national dispute in the boot and shoe industry in 1934 provides further evidence of the way that the Northampton public culture could imply, both to operatives and their employers, that the latter had an obligation to be fair and benevolent. Once again an apparent breach of that responsibility provoked a determined reaction. There was a high level of attendance at public meetings called by NUBSO in Northampton: it was described as "exceeding all expectations"⁽⁶⁷⁾ by the Chronicle and Echo. Unlike the operatives who resigned in 1933 the mass of the Northampton membership of NUBSO were not called upon to take industrial action. However, under W R Townely's leadership at national level effective use was made of displays of the union's capacity to take such action if necessary. The public meetings in Northampton

64. Board of Trade Working Party Report Boots and Shoes, p68

65. Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health for Northampton 1932 and 1933

66. Chronicle and Echo, 24th January 1933

67. Chronicle and Echo, 19th September 1934

were part of this process. The Chronicle and Echo reported every stage of the negotiating process under banner headlines and each failure to agree was recorded with gloom.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Local manufacturers argued that they had been forced to resort to cuts in wages and holiday pay because of the competition from non-union labour in the County area and thus were duly reported in the press.⁽⁶⁹⁾ But the general tone of the coverage of both disputes was sympathetic to the operatives. No attempt made to imply that union officials were whipping up feeling or that agitators were involved. The intervention of the Northampton NUWM in one public meeting was dismissed in a line.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Instead trade union officers were described as putting their arguments "soberly" and the response of trade union members was summed up by one reporter, who wrote that he was convinced:

That the operatives will resist to the bitter end whatever sacrifice or drastic action is demanded ... they intend to suffer no further reduction in their standard of living.⁽⁷¹⁾

The events of 1933 and 1934 had direct implications for municipal voter behaviour. In the 1933 elections Labour gained two additional seats and was only denied a third by the intervention of the ILP. In Kingsley, where working class voters accounted for only half the electorate, Labour's vote rose from around 33% to 43% of the poll. Overall the Labour vote in the municipal elections increased to 45% of votes cast in 1933 and to 47% in 1935. Despite the campaign for community unity represented by the Mayors' Winter Funds in 1933 and 1934 many working class municipal voters seem to have identified the Liberal and Conservative parties with unfair employers.

68. Chronicle and Echo, 19th and 27th September 1934, 23rd, 24th and 25th October 1934 and 15th November 1934

69. Chronicle and Echo, 27th September 1934

70. Chronicle and Echo, 21st February 1933

71. Chronicle and Echo, 19th September 1934

Up until the 1933 to 1935 period the values expressed through municipal voting can only be seen as having a slight effect in parliamentary elections. In the 1918 General election and a by-election in 1920 the contest was between Labour and Charles McCurdy, who had been the sitting MP since 1910. The 1920 by-election was caused by a constitutional quirk that made it necessary for McCurdy to resign because he had become an office holder under the Crown.⁽⁷²⁾ The turnout in both elections was very poor by Northampton standards,^(table 9) with only 62% and 67% of those eligible voting in the respective years. The effective mobilisation of the Labour vote in the face of out-of-date election registers and the continued absence of many servicemen accounts for Labour's creditable performance in 1918 as well as any other factor. The improvement in the Labour vote in 1920 followed from a slightly higher turnout, but it is notable that the Labour candidate received an additional 2544 votes and McCurdy had 1358 less than in 1918. But Margaret Bondfield, the Labour contender in 1920, 1922 and 1923 had some advantages as a candidate over W R Halls. As the Northampton Independent acknowledged, her national standing as one of the most prominent women in the Labour movement in Britain and her reputation for moderation, made it impossible to dismiss her as a dangerous revolutionary.⁽⁷³⁾ In 1918 the support Halls had received from the ILP had been used by McCurdy and his supporters to suggest that Labour had been taken over by Bolshevik sympathisers.⁽⁷⁴⁾ But although some surprise was expressed that NUBSO's claim to the Northampton nomination had been rejected once more,⁽⁷⁵⁾ Margaret Bondfield did not come under attack.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Yet she, like Halls, was an ILP sponsored candidate.

72. Northampton Independent, 27th March 1920

73. Northampton Independent, 27th March 1920

74. Northampton Daily Echo, 14th October 1918 and 4th, 7th, 11th, 12th and 14th December 1918

75. Shoe Trades Journal, 10th and 17th October 1919

76. Northampton Independent, 27th March 1920. In fact the editor admitted that "Miss Bondfield is a candidate of quite different character (from Mr Halls)"

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Charles McCurdy enjoyed the unanimous support of the town's social and political elite in the years immediately following the war. His standing as a member of the Coalition Government and his role as a sympathetic advocate of the interests of the shoe industry gave him many opportunities to present himself as the spokesman for Northampton regardless of party or class. Like many manufacturers he also stressed his humble origins and personal benevolence as qualifications for leadership. He was the son of Nottingham carpenter turned non-conformist Minister. Charles McCurdy himself had studied Law at Cambridge University but he could demonstrate plebian sympathies.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Nonetheless, the low turnouts in 1918 and 1920 could have been based on a combination of registration problems, the unwillingness of Conservatives to vote for a Liberal and Liberal reluctance to accept the idea of association with Conservatism. This would be in keeping with the general tendency to abstentionism found in municipal elections.

In 1922 General election over 85% of the electorate voted and in the absence of a Conservative candidate this does suggest that party allegiance could sometimes take second place to a desire for social unity. Yet the spectacle of bitter division amongst the business community exposed in the election did not precipitate any substantial increase in Labour support. Some 10% of the voters supported the Independent Liberal candidate put forward by anti-coalition NLA. Both Conservative and Liberal supporters must therefore have turned out in large numbers to vote for McCurdy. Margaret Bondfield's success in 1923 was based on some increase in the Labour vote. The Northampton Independent was convinced that she had attracted the support of the small body of voters who had opted for the Independent Liberal candidate in 1922.⁽⁷⁸⁾ But

77. Northampton Independent, 27th March 1920

78. Northampton Independent, 18th October 1924

the presentation of two rival candidates both with substantial claims to represent the Northampton ethos of leadership was seen as the major factor.⁽⁷⁹⁾ Despite the Conservative J V Collier's unpopular advocacy of protectionism⁽⁸⁰⁾ he was an important local figure. McCurdy came bottom of the poll but the vote was more evenly divided than this result implies. Collier gained the votes of 29.98% of those who went to the poll and McCurdy 29.52%.

The General election of 1924 indicates that whatever part parochial responses had played in earlier parliamentary elections they were becoming less important in the minds of the majority of voters than defeating the Labour party. The Liberal party's support declined to 23% of the poll in 1924 despite James Manfield's local candidature.⁽⁸¹⁾ But it held at that level in 1928 and only declined by a further 3% in 1929. The continued role of Liberal Councillors in the municipality and the personal loyalty they inspired could have played some part in counteracting the temptation to desert a declining party. The Labour vote remained fairly steady from 1923 to 1928 and Labour's second victory in 1928 was given to it by a tiny band of voters, who opted for an Independent Conservative candidate. The independent was a small scale Northampton shoe manufacturer, standing as J V Collier had done, for protectionism.⁽⁸²⁾ He obtained just under 3% of the vote but this was enough to prevent the official Conservative candidate from winning.

Cecil L'Estrange Malone, who became Northampton's second Labour MP in 1928, repeated his success in 1929 and increased his share of the vote to nearly 42%.

79. Northampton Independent, 24th November 1923

80. Northampton Independent, 24th November 1923

81. Northampton Independent, 18th October 1924. At the beginning of the campaign the editor confidently predicted that "the popularity and philanthropy of Mr Manfield will not ensure a solid Liberal vote but induce many of those influenced by personal rather than political considerations to vote for him".

82. Northampton Independent, 7th January 1928

He was not free from the taint of extremism. In the course of both elections his earlier membership of the Communist party and spell in prison had been made the subject of press comment and of jibes by the other parties.⁽⁸³⁾ But the absence of a unified opposition, and particularly of a candidate who could claim to represent Northampton as a community, seems to have helped Malone. There was a national swing toward Labour in the wake of the General Strike and Trades Disputes Act of 1927 and like working class voters elsewhere some Northamptonians could have been included to view the Labour party's class politics with more respect because of these events.⁽⁸⁴⁾ However, it also seems possible that Labour support remained conditioned by the legitimacy which its Councillors enjoyed in the municipal context. Malone himself certainly used his period of office between 1928 and 1931 to re-enforce his title to being a representative of the Northampton interest. As a junior minister under F O Broberts from 1929 to 1931⁽⁸⁵⁾ Malone was the first Northampton MP since Charles McCurdy to have the ear of government. Had his efforts to interest Labour ministers in the fate of the shoe industry been more successful, it might have given Malone some extra votes in 1931. But Oswald Mosley's stinging and public rebuff to Malone's shoe manufacturer delegation prevented any possibility of this happening.⁽⁸⁶⁾

The MacDonald vision of the Labour party as a party of the national interest was, of course, fundamentally undermined by the 1931 crisis that brought in the National Government. In Northampton, as in the country as a whole, electors were presented with the image of a Labour party so ingrained with sectarian feeling that it was unable to face up to its obvious responsibilities.⁽⁸⁷⁾

83. Northampton Independent, 7th January 1928 and Northampton Herald, 11th October 1929

84. C Cook and I Taylor, The Labour Party (1980), p89

85. ----- Who was Who 1961-1970 (1971) and Who's Who of British MPs - 1918-1945 (Sussex 1979)

86. The circumstances are described in footnote 104 of Chapter 4

87. A J P Taylor, English History, p405

In that election Sir Mervyn Manningham Buller clearly attracted the support of the most persistent of Liberal voters as well as more natural Conservative following. The turnout was over 87%, just as it had been in 1929 when there was a Liberal as well as a Conservative candidate. Manningham Buller's share of the vote was almost 64% in excess of Charles McCurdy's share in 1918. But while Labour's vote was down by nearly 5% on 1929 it still managed to hold on to just over 36% of the votes cast. It can only be a matter of speculation what part was played in the result by the fact that the national crisis and the subsequent General election took place just as a Labour Mayor was about to take office and Alderman Slinn's much publicised final illness was being reported. The funeral took place on the 5th of November, ten days after the election and so both the ceremonial recognition which he was accorded and the Mayor making itself would not have had a direct impact. However, Malone's denunciation of the "Bankers Ramp" which had brought about the fall of the Labour Government did have echoes of the hostility toward financiers and other outsiders' expressed by the town's business community. It may have achieved greater credence because of this.

But if Liberal voters had been willing to make the transition to voting for Sir Mervyn Manningham Buller in 1931 in an urge to restore national unity and purpose, the conditions of 1935 gave him no such advantage. At municipal level, as we have seen, voters sometimes seemed ready to vote for an individual despite his party. But Sir Mervyn did little between 1931 and 1935 to gain a place in the ranks of Northampton's acknowledged leaders. He took little or no part in the manufacturers campaign against Bata's relocation at Tilbury. He was indeed so silent on the subject that Malone publically accused him of having shares in the Company.⁽⁸⁸⁾ During 1933 and 1934 when unemployment and industrial disputes were creating considerable local unease it was left

88. Chronicle and Echo, 28th September 1933

to Northampton Mayors to speak for peace and reconciliation.⁽⁸⁹⁾ By contrast Labour activists were amongst the most prominent spokesmen for social harmony. As Mayor from November 1934 to November 1935, Albert Burrows, the leader of the Labour group, pleaded for peace and understanding between "my friends on both sides of industry".⁽⁹⁰⁾ William Barratt's donation of over £50,000 for the building of a maternity home and gynaecological unit in 1934 was also a notable attempt to restore the tradition of manufacturer benevolence to Northampton. Labour's record was marred in this respect by the choice of Reginald Paget as the Labour candidate. He was, he said, a Marxist and his opening speech in the election campaign confirmed that his position was not "sentimental" or "religious" but based on the need to do away with "Capitalism" and the "economic chaos" it had bred.⁽⁹¹⁾

The LNU's famous peace ballot in 1935 has been seen as the swan song of a movement in decline and one which had little influence on the General election result.⁽⁹²⁾ But Northamptonians had just emerged from a most distressing period of social and industrial conflict. During 1933 and 1934 there had been a distinct rise in attendance at some local chapels⁽⁹³⁾ and a number of new LNU branches had come into being.⁽⁹⁴⁾ The organiser of one such branch boasted that its members had doubled the congregation at the local church.⁽⁹⁵⁾ Whether it was interest in the international issues of peace and war which stimulated religious participation or religious feeling which

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- 89. Parliamentary Debates Official Reports fifth series Vol 1297 (28th January 1934 to 15th February 1935), p1137. The only time at which Manningham Buller referred to the unemployment issue was to ask whether UAB officials had been given instructions to refuse information to Constituency MPs
 - 90. Chronicle and Echo, 9th November 1934
 - 91. Mercury and Herald, 25th October 1935
 - 92. D S Birn, *The League of National Union*, p102
 - 93. Minutes of the Men's Own at Doddridge Chapel 1929-1940. Membership of the group peaked at 400 in 1933 declining to below 300 by 1936
 - 94. Interview with David Walmsley, a Northampton Methodist in May 1986. 'Fireside' meetings at the chapel of which he was a member attracted audiences of 500 or more to listen to LNU speakers in the 1930's
 - 95. Chronicle and Echo, 27th February 1933

prompted pacifist activity, it is clear that peace had a special salience to some voters. It was only a small minority, of course, who went from door to door collecting signatures on the Peace Ballot but these activists found themselves in a particular dilemma at the General election. Manningham Buller could not be supported for he was an ex-Liberal Unionist, a professional soldier and an obvious imperialist.⁽⁹⁶⁾ In the run up to the General election the NCLP had been making a determined appeal for pacifist support, as the party's status in the Labour Peace and Freedom Campaign of 1934, showed. The resignation of Malone and his replacement by Paget did not entirely destroy Labour's claims to being the peace party especially as the LNU's own position on intervention was not absolutely clear. During the campaign both Albert Burrows and Manningham Buller spoke at a "mass peace meeting", organised by the LNU in the constituency.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Letters to the press from some prominent chapel figures urged a vote for Paget, "the peace candidate".⁽⁹⁸⁾ For those who were not actively involved in the LNU the issues presented by the 1935 election campaign were probably not as influential as the general atmosphere which surrounded it. Many voters had been approached to sign the Peace Ballot and though they may not have understood the complex arguments about how war should be prevented, they were worried about the social peace of their own community. The public culture had also encouraged them to distrust outsiders and foreigners and anti-war feeling could thus have concealed a preference for isolationism, the course advocated by Malone.

In 1935 Northampton for the first time became a marginal constituency. Labour improved its vote by four thousand on 1931. On a turnout of 79.5% as opposed to 87% in 1931 Labour had very clearly maximised its support at the 1935 election. But the most striking

96. Chronicle and Echo, 30th October 1935

97. Northampton Independent, 1st November 1935

98. Chronicle and Echo, 12th November 1935

feature of the result was the decline in Manningham Buller's vote. He lost just over 9000 votes between 1931 and 1935. The lower turnout in 1935 clearly affected Conservative support. Abstention, in the Northampton context, could well be interpreted as rejection rather than apathy. In 1923 rival claims^{to} represent community values had divided the anti-Labour vote almost equally, in 1935 it seems to have led to an improvement in the Labour party's support and a steep decline in Conservative voting.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that Northamptonians did respond to the ideas present in the public culture. They found in their own experience sufficient confirmation of its meritocratic tenets to choose their Councillors by reference to personal qualifications for office. Party preferences played a part in the process and the Liberal party's continued credibility was important to a number of municipal results. In parliamentary terms too, traditional party loyalties were often significant. But since all the parties made some claim to represent the interests of the town it is not surprising that both working class and middle class electors felt able to indulge in some tactical voting and non-voting. Though the Labour party gained support over the years it did so principally in this context. It was able to convince many working class voters that it was committed to the common good of the community. It was especially successful in this respect when it presented candidates of high status or with a neighbourhood background. When the Labour party could offer such candidates it also enjoyed the benefit of allowing party divisions amongst Conservative and Liberal supporters to continue. It was when the party appeared to represent a threat that its opponents tended to unite. This was the case particularly in the General elections of 1924 and 1931. But national definitions of the class character of the Labour party do not

seem to have been sufficiently influential to make this trend really strong. Instead, as in 1935, the social pressures within Northampton itself combined with the local party's perceived legitimacy deterred reaction. In the 1930's unlike the 1920's, however, those Northamptonians who voted Labour did so because they no longer believed that their employers were town patriots. Those who abstained from voting may well have shared that view, but they remained not fully convinced of Labour's counter claim to the title.

TABLE 7

LIBERAL WEAKNESS, THE LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE PACT 1932 AND THE LABOUR ADVANCE

WARD	LIBERALS WEAK 1919-1930	PACT ARRANGEMENT 1932		3 CONSERVATIVE	NO PACT	LABOUR GAINS SEATS 1930'S
		2 LIBERALS	2 CONSERVATIVE			
CASTLE	X		X			X
DELAPRE	X		X			X
KINGSLEY		X				
KINGSTHORPE		X				X
ST CRISPIN	X				X	X
ST EDMUND	X		X			
ST GEORGE (NW)		X				
ST JAMES		X				
ST MICHAEL	X		X			
SPENCER (NW)	X		X			X
SOUTH	X			X		
WESTON (NW)	X		X			

NW + New Ward. Information based on the Wards they substantially replaced.

SOURCE: Municipal election coverage in Northampton Herald 1919-1930 and Mercury and Herald 1932-1938

TABLE 8COUNCILLORS RESIDENT IN WARD REPRESENTED (1919-1930)

<u>WARD</u>	<u>RESIDENT %</u>
DELAPRE	83
CASTLE	80
ST JAMES	75
KINGSTHORPE	70
KINGSLEY	66
ST CRISPIN	60
ST EDMUND	60
	----- UNDER 50%
ABINGTON	37
SOUTH	29
ST LAWRENCE	25
ST MICHAEL	20
NORTH	14

SOURCE: Northampton Municipal Year Books 1919-1930

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>PARTY ELECTED</u>	<u>NUMBER & % LABOUR VOTE</u>		<u>NUMBER & % LIBERAL VOTE</u>		<u>NUMBER & % CONSERVATIVE VOTE</u>	<u>TURNOUT</u>
1918	Co-alition Liberal	37.33% (10735)		62.63% (18008)		Not standing	62.49%
1920 (by-election)	Co-alition Liberal	44.37% (13279)		55.63% (16650)		Not standing	67.1%
1922	Co-alition Liberal	37.92% (14498)		52.25% (19974)		Not standing (Independent Liberal) 9.81%	85.5%
1923	Labour	40.49% (15556)		29.52% (11342)		29.98% (11520)	84.3%
1924	Conservative	37.15% (15046)		23.29% (9456)		39.54% (15997)	87%
1928 (by-election)	Labour	37.49% (15173)		23.68% (954)		36.12% (14616) (Independent Conservative) 2.7%	84.2%
1929	Labour	41.31% (22356)		20.62% (11054)		37.65% (20177) NEW FRANCHISE	87.5%
1931	Conservative (National Candidate)	36.36% (19898)		Not standing		63.63% (34817)	87.4%
1935	Conservative	48.52% (23983)		Not standing		51.47% (25438)	79.6%

SOURCE: FWS Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

One purpose of this study has been to show that the town patriotism described by Joyce⁽¹⁾ was still prevalent in the twentieth century. Despite the apparent centralisation of state power and the national and class orientation of British politics, localism still had an important part to play in the political process and in the values of the electorate. Some of the features of the ethos in Northampton could be ascribed to its heritage from the nineteenth century. The presence of a tradition of Radical Liberalism and non-conformism was very important to the way the inter-war elite responded to the new business philosophy which emerged during the first World War. Specific events like the battle for 'Northampton's Right' to elect Bradlaugh could be seen as a formative influence on the political parties perceptions of how divisions within the community could be negotiated. Though most of the men involved in local politics between the wars were only children when that campaign was taking place, their native background gave them access to a sense of historical identity. This factor was significant too in the elite's attitudes toward the working class and lower middle class. Beliefs about the nature of the town's working class were based as much on the myths about manual worker home ownership created in the nineteenth century as on contemporary realities. It could be argued that the sensitivity displayed toward the housing shortages which followed the war was heavily conditioned by such long term influences. Furthermore, Northampton industrialists were a relatively new elite. This could indicate that the interest they demonstrated, in making gifts to the town and contributing to voluntary and charitable life, was simply a late manifestation of a nineteenth century style of social leadership.

1. P J Joyce, *Work Society and Politics*, pp93 and 278

However, Northampton manufacturers did not simply continue with an existing pattern of paternalism. Their urge to create an image of Northampton and to project themselves as entrepreneurs was not solely motivated by newly acquired wealth and status. The experience of war, of state recognition of the working class interest and of the economic challenge which faced them in the post war world all played a part in making industrialists conscious of the need to project a functional social image. The stress on science, research and modernism in Northampton's business philosophy suggests that its proponents were not an anachronistic hangover from an earlier age. Industrialists in Britain were developing a new industrial relations strategy based on an acceptance of the validity of interest on both sides⁽²⁾ and were also involved in a widespread industrial welfare movement.⁽³⁾ Northampton industrialists were thus in the mainstream of modern business philosophy. Their special enthusiasm and persistence could be seen as justifying Buswell's argument that there are contexts in which commercial imperatives prompt socially responsible action.⁽⁴⁾ Many of the town's industrial leaders were engaged in just the type of relationships with customers and business peers which he describes. They were retailers as well as manufacturers and despite the development of the large scale firm in the shoe industry, the range and size of businesses in Northampton were such as to promote a desire to co-operate within the commercial community.

The Northampton shoe industry's aversion to industrial conflict and its willingness to adopt short time working as an alternative to unemployment was the product of late nineteenth century conditions. In an attempt to overcome the difficulties presented by a workforce unused to factory discipline the industry had accepted the type of industrial relations policy described

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2. R Charles, The Development of Industrial Relations in Britain, pp24-27
 3. H Jones, Employer Welfare Schemes and Industrial Relations in inter-war Britain, pp61-62
 4. Prof. J Buswell, The Informal Social Control Business, p245

by Charles at an early stage. Habit and inertia may have been partly responsible for the failure to change toward a more aggressive stance in the different circumstances of interwar Britain. But as the events of 1933 and 1934 show, industrialists were subjected to pressure, both directly through the behaviour of their operatives and indirectly in the tone of local press coverage of such events. The role of the Mayoralty in the response to high levels of unemployment in 1933 and 1934 also highlights the way in which town institutions sometimes acted as a pressure on manufacturers to conform.

Both lower middle class and working class interests were affected by the conduct of the town economy. The increasing importance of municipal intervention to the prosperity of that economy was therefore crucial to the consensus which developed in the Borough Council. The provision of Council housing counteracted a tendency to depression in the private enterprise economy as well as providing benefits to the working class.

Northampton's municipal arrangements were a miniature version of Middlemas' corporate state.⁽⁵⁾ The conflict between political parties concealed a process of negotiation between varying economic interests including that of the organised working class. The Borough Council's professional servants played a less authoritative role than civil servants in the state, but the influence can be detected in the way that municipal policy followed the advice of the consultants responsible for the Northampton development proposals. Institutional resources were used to manipulate public opinion in the locality, just as they were at national level. The campaign against the Czechoslovak firm Bata and the Mayors' Funds offer a local dimension to national strategies for managing unrest, but the state and its financier allies

5. K Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society*, p18

were also common scapegoats. As Dale suggests tensions between national and local institutions were inevitable given the relative autonomy of local government in Britain.⁽⁶⁾

Town patriotism served as a means of sustaining middle class values in a community threatened with conflict. But it was also an effective vehicle for Labour activists seeking support amongst a Conservative working class. The NCLP did not have a revolutionary vision in the Marxist sense. Like Labour parties in other parts of the country, it wanted a complete change, but without conflict.⁽⁷⁾ Within its own structure the Labour movement in Northampton had "a subculture but not a counter culture",⁽⁸⁾ just as Boughton found in Birmingham Labour party. But the NCLP's role as a spokesman for the community was not given to it as an ungrudged gift. The partial legitimacy it was granted was perhaps the result of some fortuitous recruitment. The youthful conversion of Bassett Lowke and William Barratt had certainly given the party advantages in claiming to be part of the town meritocracy. The social consequences of this type of businessman participation in local Labour parties has been underexplored. Both Boughton and Wyncoll,⁽¹⁰⁾ for example, mention it in the context of Labour movement life in Birmingham and Nottingham but not as an influence on the way the middle class establishment reacted to the Labour party. However, though the status of certain individuals was important it was probably not crucial. Above all the NCLP was the beneficiary of the divisions in the middle class. For although industrialists, tradesmen and local political representatives of the Liberal and Conservative parties displayed a remarkable unanimity

6. J Dale, *Class Struggle, Social Policy and State Structure*, pp201-202
7. B Barker, *Anatomy of Reformism, The Social and Political Ideas of the Labour Leadership in Yorkshire* in International Review of Social History, Vol XXIII 1973, pp11-16
8. J Boughton, *Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield*, p334
9. J Boughton, *Working Class Politics in Birmingham and Sheffield*, pp133-136
10. P Wyncoll, *The Nottingham Labour Movement*, p228

around the need for municipal reform, they were divided by party and a minority did try to break with progressive industrial relations policies. It was in this context that the Labour movement could, at least to some extent, set the agenda for what was acceptable to the community. If such a process of negotiation of interests at the local level proves to be widespread then Middlemas' corporate state concept may need amending to give a more active role to both provincial elites and Labour movement activists.

Castle's critique of the British Labour party rests on the assumption that the development of a social democratic hegemony was prevented by the homogeneity of the country's ruling class.⁽¹¹⁾ The decline of British Liberalism and the growth of anti-Labour alliances in municipal politics during the interwar years has given his thesis considerable substance. But as this study has attempted to show, official pacts and alliances could conceal rather more subtle processes of change. In Northampton radical and non-conformist beliefs inhibited middle class and working class from fully accepting Conservative dominance, especially in 1935. In general during this study I have avoided making direct comparisons between Northampton and other towns and cities. I have not, for example, drawn on other work on unemployment, housing provision and secondary education in local contexts. There is sufficient evidence that both local differences and conciliatory responses were present in the application of social policy elsewhere in interwar Britain.⁽¹²⁾ My purpose has been to describe in some

11. F G Castles, *The Social Democratic Image of Society*, pp10-12

12. N Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties*, p125, N Branson and M Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (1973), p37 and N Branson, *Poplarism 1919-1925* (1979), p228. All these works draw attention to occasions when Councillors interpreted national policy in the light of local conditions. Not all the Councils generous in the provision of free secondary schooling, public assistance payments or wage levels were Labour controlled

detail the interplay of forces which produced a particular Northampton ethos. In doing so it has been my intention to suggest how that material might be reinterpreted. Other studies, taking as their starting point community as well as class pressures, may find a rich vein of interest and a better understanding of British society and politics between the wars.

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